THE INDIA RUBBER BOY

RUSSIAN CLASSICAL STORIES FOR CHILDREN

RADUGA PUBLISHERS

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THE INDIA RUBBER BOY

Russian Classical Stories for Children

Drawings by *Georgi Yudin*

RADUGA PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW

Translation from the Russian

REQUEST TO READERS

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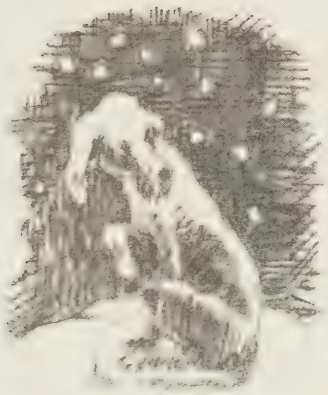
Anton Chekhov

KASHTANKA

Translated by *Robert Daglish*



It is said that in his "Kashtanka" Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) described an episode from the experience of Vladimir Durov, the famous Russian animal-trainer.

Vladimir Durov founded the Russian national school of animal-training and started the Durov circus dynasty, celebrated throughout the world today. The principle of his school is that encouragement and affection, and by no means the whip, should be used in training animals. Durov and Chekhov were very good friends, and they had a great deal in common. Anton Chekhov always had some pets living in his house: there had been two dachshunds called Bromide and Quinine, two mongrel pups Kashtan and Beloluby, and a crane that ate out of his hands. Chekhov loved going to the circus.

The short story "Kashtanka" was first published in a newspaper in 1887. It was not until five years later that Chekhov succeeded in getting it brought out in book-form for children's reading. The book was a great success. Chekhov wrote to his brother: "During dinner the children could not tear their eyes away from me, expecting me to say something extraordinarily clever. They regard me as a genius because I'd written 'Kashtanka'." In Chekhov's lifetime the book had stood ten editions, and remains one of the stories best loved by children till this day.

"Fatch", "Vanka", "The Fugitive", *The Steppe*, "Boys", "An Event", "I Want to Sleep", "Children", and other stories are as popular with young readers. The language in which these tales are told is beautiful, told with Chekhov's gentle and somewhat melancholy humour, they speak of the author's excellent knowledge of life and people, and most important of all they hold promise of a life, worthy of man.

Chapter One

Bad Behaviour

A young chestnut-coloured dog — a cross between a dachshund and a mongrel — with a muzzle very much like that of a fox, was running to and fro along the pavement and looking round worriedly in all directions. Sometimes she would stop and, whimpering, lift now one chilled paw, now the other, trying to comprehend how such a thing could have happened to her. She was lost.

She remembered perfectly well how she had spent the day and how, in the end, she had come to be on this unfamiliar stretch of pavement.

The day had begun with her master, the joiner Luka Alexandrych, putting on his hat, tucking a wooden thing wrapped in a red shawl under his arm, and shouting: "Come on, Kashtanka!"

At the sound of her name the cross between a dachshund and a mongrel had crawled out from under the bench, where she slept among the wood shavings, stretched herself deliciously and ran off after her master. Luka Alexandrych's customers all lived terribly far away, so before he reached any of them, the joiner had to drop in at various taverns to build up his strength. Kashtanka could remember behaving in a most unseemly fashion. She had been so overjoyed at being taken for a walk that she had pranced about, rushing forward and barking at the horse-drawn trams, darting into backyards and chasing other dogs. The joiner would lose sight of her, stop and call her crossly. On one occasion, with an expression of extreme relish on his face he had gathered up her fox's ear in his fist, shaken it and said between long pauses: "You ... ought ... to ... be ... dead, you ... varmint."

When he had finished visiting his customers, Luka Alexandrych dropped in for a minute to see his sister and had a drink and a snack with her; from his sister's he went on to a book-binder he knew, from the book-binder to a tavern, from the tavern to one of his wife's people, and so on. In a word, by the time Kashtanka found herself on this unfamiliar stretch of pavement, evening was coming on and the joiner was as drunk as a lord. He kept waving his arms, sighing deeply and muttering to himself: "Born in sin of my mother's womb! Aye, in sin, in sin! We're walking along

the street now, looking at the street lamps, but when we're dead we'll burn in hell's fire..."

Or else he would lapse into good-natured tones, call Kashtanka over to him and say to her: "You, Kashtanka, are nothing but an insect. Compared to a human being, you're no more than what a carpenter is to a joiner..."

While he was talking to her like this, there was a sudden burst of music. Kashtanka looked round and saw a regiment of soldiers marching straight towards her down the street. Unable to bear the sound of music, which upset her nerves, she started dashing about and howling. But to her great surprise, the joiner, instead of taking fright and starting to squeal and bark himself, gave a broad smile, drew himself up to attention and saluted. Seeing that her master was making no protest, Kashtanka howled even louder, then lost her head altogether and dashed across the road to the other pavement.

When she recovered her wits, the music had stopped and the regiment had disappeared. She ran back across the road to the spot where her master had been, but to her dismay he was not there. She dashed on ahead, and then back, and ran across the road again, but the joiner was nowhere to be found. Kashtanka started sniffing the pavement, hoping to pick up her master's scent, but some scoundrel had just gone by in new rubber galoshes and now all the finer scents were mingled with the stench of rubber and she could not tell one from the other.

While Kashtanka was running to and fro unable to find her master, it began to grow dark. All the street lamps on both sides of the street were on and lights had appeared in the houses. Snow began to fall in big feathery flakes, whitening the roadway, the backs of the horses and the caps of the coachmen, and the darker the air became the whiter were the objects all around. Customers that Kashtanka had never seen before kept passing back and forth, blocking her field of vision and kicking her. (Kashtanka divided the whole of mankind into two very unequal parts: masters and customers. There was one essential difference between the two: the former had the right to beat her, while she herself had the right to snap at the calves of the latter.) These customers were all in a hurry and paid no attention to her.

When it grew quite dark, Kashtanka was overcome by despair and terror. She cringed in a doorway and began to cry bitterly. The day's jour-

neying with Luka Alexandrych had tired her out. Her ears and paws were frozen and, on top of it all, she was terribly hungry. She had had only two scraps to eat all day. At the book-binder's she had licked up a little fish glue and, in one of the taverns she had found a bit of sausage skin by the counter — and that was all. If she had been a human being she would probably have thought: "No, I can't go on living like this. I had better shoot myself!"

Chapter Two

The Mysterious Stranger

But she was not thinking of anything at all. She could only whimper. When her head and back were completely swathed in the soft, feathery snow and she had fallen into the restless drowsiness of exhaustion, the door gave a sudden click and creaked open, hitting her in the ribs. She jumped up. From the open doorway there emerged a person belonging to the category of customers. Since Kashtanka had squealed and got in his way, he could not fail to notice her. He bent down and asked: "Where are you from, doggy? Did I kick you? Oh, you poor little thing... Now, don't be cross, don't be cross — I'm sorry."

Kashtanka looked up at the stranger through the snowflakes clinging to her eyelashes and saw in front of her a short, stout little man with a clean-shaven chubby face, wearing a top hat and fur coat that was unbuttoned all the way down the front.

"What are you whimpering about?" he went on, flicking the snow off her back with his finger. "Where's your master? You're lost, aren't you? Ah, poor little doggy! What shall we do now?"

Catching the sympathetic warmth in the stranger's voice, Kashtanka licked his hand and whimpered all the louder.

"You're a nice, funny little thing!" said the stranger. "A proper little fox! Well, then? Come along with me! Perhaps you can make yourself useful. Now then — hiyup!"

He smacked his lips and made a sign that could mean only one thing: "Come!" So Kashtanka went.

In no more than half an hour she was sitting on the floor of a large, well-lighted room and, with her head cocked on one side, staring in affec-

tion and curiosity at the stranger, who was seated at table eating his dinner. He was throwing her scraps while he ate... First he gave her some bread and a green rind of cheese, then a scrap of meat, half a pie and some chicken bones, and in her hunger she swallowed it down so quickly that she had no time to make out the taste. And the more she ate the more she became aware of her hunger.

"They do feed you badly at home, don't they!" the stranger observed, seeing the frantic greed with which she swallowed the unchewed morsels. "How skinny you are! Nothing but skin and bones."

Kashtanka ate a great deal without satisfying her hunger. The food only intoxicated her. After dinner she lay down in the middle of the room, stretched out her legs and, feeling a pleasant languor in every limb, began to wag her tail. While her new master sat back in his armchair, smoking a cigar, she wagged her tail and puzzled over the question of where it was better — here, at the stranger's, or at the joiner's? The stranger's furniture was shabby and unattractive. Apart from the armchairs, sofa, lamp and rugs he had nothing and the room seemed empty; on the other hand, the joiner's place was packed with things; he had a table, a bench, a heap of shavings, planes, chisels, saws, a cage with a siskin in it, a wash-tub... The stranger's quarters smelled of nothing in particular, while the joiner's place was always wreathed in a kind of haze and smelled wonderfully of glue, varnish and shavings. On the other hand, the stranger's quarters had one very important advantage — plenty to eat and, to give him his due, while Kashtanka had been sitting by the table and looking up at him in affection, he had not once kicked her or stamped his foot, and not once shouted: "Git out of here, durn ye!"

Having smoked his cigar, the new master went out and came back a minute or two later carrying a small mattress.

"Come on, doggy, come over here!" he said, putting the mattress down in the corner by the sofa. "Lie down here and go to sleep."

Then he turned out the lamp and left the room. Kashtanka stretched herself out on the little mattress and closed her eyes; a sound of barking came from the street and she was about to answer it, when she suddenly felt very sad. She remembered Luka Alexandrych, his son Fedya, and the cosy nook under the bench. She remembered how during the long winter evenings, when the joiner was either planing wood or reading about from the newspaper, Fedya usually played with her. He would pull her out

from under the bench by her hind legs and perform such tricks with her that everything would go green before her eyes and she would ache in every limb. He would make her walk on her hind legs, he would pretend she was a bell, that is to say, tug at her tail until she barked and squealed. He would put snuff under her nose... The following trick was particularly painful: Fedya would tie a piece of meat to a thread and give it to Kashtanka; then, when she had swallowed it down, he would drag it back out of her stomach with roars of laughter. And the more vivid the memories, the louder and more plaintive was Kashtanka's whimpering.

Presently, however, weariness and warmth overcame sadness. She was falling off to sleep. In her mind's eye she saw dogs running hither and thither; among them was a shaggy old poodle she had seen that day in the street, with a wall-eye and tufts of fur round his nose. Fedya was chasing the poodle with a chisel in his hand, then all of a sudden he himself became covered in shaggy fur, started barking merrily and turned up right beside Kashtanka herself. Kashtanka and he good-naturedly sniffed each other's noses and ran out into the street...

Chapter Three

A New and Very Pleasant Acquaintanceship

When Kashtanka awoke, it was already light and sounds that are to be heard only in the daytime were coming from the street. There was not a soul in the room. Kashtanka stretched herself, yawned and in an irritable, gloomy mood took a walk round. She sniffed the corners and the furniture, peeped into the hall and found nothing of interest there either. There was another door besides the one leading into the hall. Kashtanka hesitated for a moment, scratched it with both paws, pushed it open and entered the next room. There, sleeping in the bed under a flannelette blanket was a customer whom she recognised as the stranger of yesterday.

"Grrr..." she gave a low growl but, recalling yesterday's dinner, wagged her tail and began to sniff.

She sniffed the stranger's boots and clothes and discovered that they smelt strongly of horses. Yet another door, also closed, led somewhere from the bedroom. Kashtanka scratched this door, leaned against it,

pushed it open and at once became aware of a strange, very suspicious smell. Sensing an unpleasant encounter ahead, Kashtanka walked growling and glancing around her into a small room with dingy wallpaper, but the next moment she was backing away in fear. She had seen something quite unexpected and frightening. With its neck and head lowered until they were almost flat with the ground, spreading its wings and hissing, a grey goose was coming straight towards her. A little to one side, on a small mattress lay a white cat; at the sight of Kashtanka it jumped up, arched its back, erected its tail and with its fur bristling all over also began to hiss. The dog was more than a little frightened but, not wishing to show fear, started barking loudly and charged at the cat... The cat arched its back even higher, spat and struck Kashtanka on the head with its paw. Kashtanka recoiled, crouched down on all four paws and, pointing her muzzle at the cat, burst into loud yapping; meanwhile the goose approached from behind and pecked her painfully in the back. Kashtanka spun round and flung herself at the goose.

"What's all this?" a loud, angry voice was heard, and the stranger entered the room in a dressing-gown and with a cigar between his teeth. "What do you mean by it? Back where you belong!"

He went up to the cat, flicked its arched back and said: "Fyodor Timofeich, what's the meaning of this? Did you start a fight? You old rogue! Lie down!"

And at the goose he shouted: "Ivan Ivanych, back to your place!"

The cat lay down obediently on his little mattress and closed his eyes. To judge from the expression of his face and whiskers he himself regretted his hastiness in joining the fight. Kashtanka whimpered in a hurt kind of way, and the goose stretched its neck and began talking about something quickly, heatedly and clearly, but quite incomprehensibly.

"All right! All right!" the master said yawning. "You must learn to live together." He stroked Kashtanka and went on: "And you, Ginger, don't be afraid — you're in good company. They won't do you any harm. Now what shall we call you? You can't be without a name, old girl."

He thought for a moment.

"I have it! You'll be Auntie! Understand? Auntie!"

And having repeated the word "Auntie" several times, he withdrew. Kashtanka sat down and watched. The cat was lying very still on his mattress and pretending to be asleep. The goose with his neck craned for-

ward and marking time on one spot continued to speak of something very fast and heatedly. Apparently he was a very clever goose; after every long tirade he stepped back in surprise and pretended to be delighted with the way he had spoken... Having listened to him and replied with a "Grrr...", Kashtanka set about sniffing the corners. In one of the corners stood a little trough containing soaked peas and some sodden crusts of rye-bread. She tasted the peas but they weren't very nice, so she tried the crusts and began to eat them. The goose took no offence that this strange dog should be eating his food. On the contrary, he began to hold forth even more volubly and, to show his trust, actually came up to the trough himself and ate a few peas.

Chapter Four

Wonder of Wonders

A little later the stranger came in again and brought with him a strange thing that looked like a gate. From the crossbar of this rough wooden gate there hung a bell and to the crossbar was tied a pistol; strings dangled from the tongue of the bell and the trigger of the pistol. The stranger placed the gate in the middle of the room, spent a long time untying something and tying something up, then looked at the goose and said: "Ivan Ivanych, be so kind!"

The goose went up to him and stood in an expectant pose.

"Now then, sir," said the stranger. "We shall begin at the very beginning. First of all, make a bow! Lively now!"

Ivan Ivanych stretched out his neck, nodded in all directions and scraped his webbed foot.

"That's it! Good lad! Now pretend to be dead!"

The goose lay down on his back and stuck his legs in the air. Having gone through a few more not very impressive tricks of this kind, the stranger suddenly clutched his head in his hands, put an expression of horror on his face and began to shout: "Help! Help! The house is on fire!"

Ivan Ivanych promptly darted up to the gate, took the string in his beak and rang the bell.

The stranger was very pleased with this. He stroked the goose's neck and said: "Good lad, Ivan Ivanych! Now imagine you're a jeweller selling

gold and diamonds. Imagine you have just come into your shop and found a thief there. How would you act in such a case?"

The goose took the other string in his beak and pulled it, whereupon a deafening shot rang out. Kashtanka loved the ringing of the bell, and the pistol shot put her in such a state of rapture that she ran round and round the gate barking.

"Down, Auntie! Down!" the stranger shouted at her. "Silence!"

Ivan Ivanych's work did not end with the shooting episode. For another hour the stranger drove him round in a circle, cracking his whip, and the goose had to jump over a hurdle and through a hoop, and rear, that is to say, sit on his tail and waggle his feet. Kashtanka could not take her eyes off Ivan Ivanych. She whimpered with delight and several times ran after him, barking loudly. Having tired out the goose and himself, the stranger wiped the sweat off his forehead and shouted: "Maria, call in Khavronya Ivanovna!"

After a minute there came a sound of grunting. Kashtanka gave a growl, put on a very bold air and, just in case, edged up closer to the stranger. The door opened, an old woman looked into the room, said something, and then let in a black and very ugly sow. Paying no attention whatever to Kashtanka's growling, the sow raised her snout and grunted gaily. Apparently, she was very glad to see her master, the cat, and Ivan Ivanych. She went up to the cat and gently nudged him in the belly with her snout and then had a word with the goose, and one could sense in her movements, in her voice and in the quivering of her tail a great deal of amiability. Kashtanka realised at once that it would be useless to growl and bark at such an individual.

The master took away the gate and shouted: "Fyodor Timofeich, be so kind!"

The cat rose, stretched himself indolently and with great reluctance, as if he were doing someone a favour, stalked up to the sow.

"Now then, let's start with the Egyptian pyramid," their master announced.

He went into a long explanation, then commanded: "One, two, three!" At the word "three", Ivan Ivanych spread his wings and sprang on to the sow's back. And when, balancing with his wings and neck, he had got a firm foothold on the bristly back, Fyodor Timofeich languidly, lazily, with obvious scorn and an air of despising and attaching no value what-

ever to his own skill, also sprang on to the sow's back, then reluctantly climbed on to the goose and poised himself there on his hind legs. The result was what the stranger had called an Egyptian pyramid. Kashtanka gave a squeal of delight, but just at that moment the old cat yawned, lost his balance and tumbled off the goose. Ivan Ivanych slipped and also fell down. The stranger shouted and waved his arms and again began to explain something. After spending a whole hour over the pyramid, the tireless master set about teaching Ivan Ivanych to ride on the cat's back, then he taught the cat to smoke, and so on.

The training ended with the stranger's wiping the sweat off his brow and going out. Fyodor Timofeich snorted disdainfully, lay down on his mattress and closed his eyes. Ivan Ivanych turned to the trough, and the sow was led out by the old woman. What with such a host of new impressions, Kashtanka had scarcely noticed the day pass, and in the evening she was installed with her little mattress in the room with dingy wallpaper and spent the night in the company of Fyodor Timofeich and the goose.

Chapter Five

Talent! What Talent!

A month had passed.

Kashtanka had grown accustomed to her tasty dinner every evening and to being called Auntie. She had also grown accustomed to the stranger and to her new room-mates. Life was going swimmingly.

Every day began in the same fashion. The first to wake up was usually Ivan Ivanych. He would immediately come over to Auntie or to the cat, stretch his neck forward and start talking about something heatedly and persuasively but just as incomprehensibly as ever. Sometimes he would lift his head high and deliver long monologues. During the first few days of their acquaintanceship Kashtanka thought he talked a lot because he was clever, but it was not long before she lost all her respect for him; when he came up to her with his long speeches, she no longer wagged her tail but regarded him as a tiresome chatterer who would not let anyone sleep, and answered him with a quite unceremonious "Grrr..."

Fyodor Timofeich, however, was quite a different breed of gentleman. When he awoke he never made a sound, never moved and did not even

open his eyes. He would gladly not have woken up at all because, so it would appear, he was not as fond of life as he might have been. Nothing interested him. He was languid and indifferent, contemptuous of everything and, even when eating his tasty dinner, he would snort disdainfully.

When Kashtanka woke up, she would make a tour of the rooms, sniffing in all the corners. Only she and the cat were given the run of the whole apartment; the goose had no right to go any further than the threshold of the room with dingy wallpaper, and Khavronya Ivanovna lived in a little shed somewhere out in the yard and appeared only during training sessions. The master slept until late and, after a light breakfast, set to work on his tricks. Every day the gate, the whip, and the hoops were brought into the room, and every day they went through almost the same programme. The training lasted three or four hours and by the end of it Fyodor Timofeich was sometimes staggering like a drunk from exhaustion, Ivan Ivanych had his beak wide open and was gasping for breath, and the master was red in the face and kept wiping the sweat running down his forehead.

Training and dinner made the days very interesting, but the evenings were rather dull. Most evenings the master would go off somewhere and take the goose and the cat with him. Left to herself, Auntie would lie down on her mattress and begin to mope. Sadness would creep up to her stealthily and gradually take possession of her, just as darkness took possession of the room. It began with her losing all desire to bark, eat, run about the rooms or even look at anything; then in her imagination there would appear vague figures that could have been either dogs or people, with faces that were dear and lovable but very strange; when they appeared, Auntie would wag her tail and it would seem to her that she had seen them somewhere before and been fond of them... And as she fell asleep she was always aware of a smell of glue, shavings and varnish coming from these figures.

One day, when she had got quite used to the new life and, instead of being a skinny, half-starved cur had become a sleek, well-groomed house-dog, the master stroked her before training and said: "It's time we got down to business, Auntie. You've been kicking your heels long enough. I want to make a performer of you. Do you want to be an artiste?"

And he began to teach her various skills. During the first lesson she learned to stand and walk on her hind legs, which delighted her. During the

second lesson she had to jump on her hind legs and snap a piece of sugar that her master was holding high above her head. At the lessons that followed she danced, ran on the end of the ring-master's leash, howled to a musical accompaniment, rang the bell and fired the pistol, and after a month was quite capable of replacing Fyodor Timofeich in the Egyptian pyramid. She practised very willingly and was pleased at her successes; running with her tongue out at the end of the long leash, jumping through a hoop and riding on the back of old Fyodor Timofeich afforded her the greatest pleasure of all. She celebrated every successful trick with resounding, triumphant barks, and her teacher also marvelled and rejoiced, and rubbed his hands.

"Talent! What talent!" he would say. "No doubt about it! You're going to be a success—that's for sure!"

And Auntie became so used to the word "talent" that, whenever her master uttered it, she would jump up and look round as if that were her name.

Chapter Six

A Troubled Night

Auntie had been having a dog's dream. She had dreamed that a janitor was chasing her with a broom, and had woken up in terror.

The little room was quiet, dark and very stuffy. The fleas were biting. Auntie had never been afraid of the dark before, but now for some reason she felt terrified and wanted to bark. In the next room her master sighed loudly, and a little later the sow in her shed grunted, and again all was silent. When you think of food it puts you in an easier frame of mind, and Auntie started thinking of how that day she had stolen a chicken's bone off Fyodor Timofeich and hidden it in the sitting-room, between the cupboard and the wall, where there was a lot of cobwebs and dust. It wouldn't be a bad thing to go and see if that bone was still there. It was quite possible that the master had found it and eaten it. But she was not allowed to leave the room before morning — that was a rule. Auntie closed her eyes to help her fall asleep, because she knew from experience that the sooner she fell asleep the sooner morning came. But all of a sudden, from not far away there came a strange cry, which made her start and jump up on all four paws. It was Ivan Ivanych who had cried out, and his cry had not

been part of his usual chattering persuasive talk but something wild, piercing and unnatural, like the creak of a big gate opening. Unable to make anything out in the darkness, Auntie felt even more terrified and gave a growl: "Grrr..."

Time passed, about as much as it takes to gnaw a good-sized bone; the cry was not repeated. Auntie calmed down little by little and fell into a doze. She dreamed of two big black dogs with tufts of last year's fur on their thighs and flanks; they were gorging themselves on swill from a large trough that gave off white steam and a delicious smell; from time to time they looked round at Auntie, showed their teeth and snarled: "We won't give you any!" But a man in a sheepskin ran out of a house and drove them away with a whip; then Auntie went up to the trough and began to eat, but as soon as the man had gone in at his gate, the two black dogs pounced on her snarling and all at once she heard that piercing cry again.

"Kheh! Kheh-heh!" cried Ivan Ivanych.

Auntie woke up, sprang to her feet and, without leaving her mattress, broke into a long, howling bark. By now it seemed to her that it was not Ivan Ivanych who had cried out but someone else, from outside. And for some reason the sow grunted again in her shed.

Then came the shuffling sound of slippers and the master entered the room in his dressing-gown and carrying a candle. The guttering light danced on the dingy wallpaper and ceiling and chased away the darkness. Auntie saw there was no stranger in the room. Ivan Ivanych was sitting on the floor and was not asleep. His wings were spread out and his beak was gaping, and in general he looked as if he was tired out and very thirsty. Old Fyodor Timofeich was not asleep either. Even he must have been awakened by the cry.

"Ivan Ivanych, what's the matter?" the master asked the goose. "Why are you crying? Are you ill?"

The goose did not respond. The master felt his neck and stroked his back.

"You're a queer fellow," he said. "You don't sleep and won't let anybody else sleep either."

Then he went out taking the light with him, and the darkness returned. Auntie was afraid. The goose did not cry out any more, but again she fancied that some stranger was standing there in the darkness. The most terrible thing of all was that this strange person could not be bitten because

he was invisible and had no shape. And, without knowing why, she felt sure that something very bad was going to happen that night. Fyodor Timofeich was also troubled. Auntie heard him fidgeting on his mattress, yawning and shaking his head.

Someone began knocking at a gate out in the street and the sow in her shed gave another grunt. Auntie whimpered, stretched out her forepaws and laid her head on them. The knocking at the gate, the grunting of the pig that for some reason was not asleep, the darkness and stillness all around conveyed to her something as mournful and frightening as there had been in Ivan Ivanych's cry. Everything was in a state of trouble and alarm. But why? Who was this stranger who could not be seen? For an instant two dull green sparks glimmered beside Auntie. It was Fyodor Timofeich, who had come up to her for the first time in all the months they had known each other. What did he want? Auntie licked his paw and, without asking why he had come, began to whine in various tones.

"Kheh!" Ivan Ivanych shrieked once more. "Kheh-heh!"

Again the door opened and the master came in with his candle. The goose was sitting in his former pose with gaping beak and spread wings. His eyes were closed.

"Ivan Ivanych!" the master called.

The goose did not stir. The master squatted in front of him, looked him over for a minute in silence and said:

"Ivan Ivanych! What's all this? Are you dying, or what?"

Then all of a sudden he clutched his head in his hands and exclaimed: "Ah, now I've remembered! I know what it is! It's because a horse trod on you today! Oh, my God!"

Auntie could not understand what her master was saying, but she could see from his face that he was expecting something terrible to happen. She pointed her nose at the dark window through which she thought some stranger was looking, and began to howl.

"He's dying, Auntie!" the master said, and clasped his hands. "Yes, he's dying! Death has entered our doors! What shall we do?"

Pale and worried, the master went back to the bedroom, sighing and shaking his head. Too afraid to stay behind in the dark, Auntie followed him. He sat down on the bed and repeated several times: "My God! What shall I do now?"

Auntie skulked by his legs and, unable to understand why she felt such

anguish and why everyone was so upset, and trying to understand, watched his every movement. Fyodor Timofeich, who rarely left his mattress, also came into the master's bedroom and began to rub up against his legs. Now and then he would shake his head, as though he wanted to shake the bad thoughts out of it, and peer suspiciously under the bed.

The master took a saucer, poured some water into it from the washstand and went back again to the goose.

"Have a drink, Ivan Ivanych," he said tenderly, setting down the saucer in front of the goose. "Have a drink, old chap."

But Ivan Ivanych did not move or open his eyes. The master pressed his head down to the saucer and dipped his beak in the water, but the goose would not drink and only spread his wings even wider, while his head remained lying in the saucer.

"Nothing is any good!" the master said with a sigh. "It's all over. Ivan Ivanych is finished!"

And shining drops rolled down his cheeks, like the ones that run down windows when it's raining. Unable to understand what was the matter, Auntie and Fyodor Timofeich pressed up against him and stared in horror at the goose.

"Poor Ivan Ivanych!" the master said, sighing sorrowfully. "And I had been thinking of how in spring I'd take you out to live in the country and we'd go for walks together on the green grass. You dear creature, my good old friend, and now you are no more! How shall I manage without you?"

It seemed to Auntie that the same thing would happen to her, that she too, for some unknown reason, would close her eyes, spread out her paws and bare her teeth, and that everyone would stare at her in horror. Fyodor Timofeich must have had similar thoughts. Never had the old cat been so sombre and gloomy as he was now.

Dawn was coming and the invisible stranger who had frightened Auntie so badly was no longer in the room. When it grew quite light, the janitor came, picked up the goose by its legs and carried it away. And a little later, the old woman appeared and took out the trough.

Auntie went into the sitting-room and peeped behind the cupboard; her master had not eaten the chicken's bone. It was still in its place, amid the dust and cobwebs. But Auntie was depressed, sad and felt like crying. She did not even sniff at the bone. Instead she went under the sofa, sat there and began to whimper quietly on a thin, high-pitched note.

Chapter Seven

An Unsuccessful Debut

One fine evening the master came into the room with dingy wallpaper and, rubbing his hands, said: "Now then!"

He seemed about to say something else but, instead of saying it, went out of the room again. Auntie, who had studied his face and intonation to perfection during the lessons, guessed that he was excited, worried and, probably, cross. A little later he returned and said: "Today I shall take you, Auntie, and Fyodor Timofeich with me. You, Auntie, will replace the late Ivan Ivanych in the Egyptian pyramid. But what a business! Nothing's ready or practised properly. There haven't been enough rehearsals! We'll disgrace ourselves and be a complete flop!"

Then he went out again and returned a minute later in his fur coat and top hat. He picked up the cat by his forepaws and tucked him away under his coat. Fyodor Timofeich seemed quite indifferent and did not even bother to open his eyes. He was apparently indifferent to everything, whether he was lying down or being picked up by his forepaws, lounging on his mattress or resting on his master's chest under the fur coat.

"Come along, Auntie," said the master.

Thoroughly bewildered but wagging her tail, Auntie followed him. A minute later she was sitting in a sleigh at her master's feet and listening to him muttering to himself as he shivered with cold and anxiety.

"We'll disgrace ourselves! We'll be a complete flop!"

The sleigh stopped outside a big, strange house that looked like an overturned tureen. The long entrance to this house with its three glass doors was lighted by a dozen bright street lamps. The doors would clang open and, like huge jaws, snap up the people jostling round the entrance. There were lots of people about and horses kept trotting up to the entrance, but there was no sign of any dogs.

The master picked up Auntie and pushed her into the front of his overcoat beside Fyodor Timofeich. It was dark and stuffy there, but warm. For a moment two dim green sparks glimmered in the darkness – the cat had opened his eyes, disturbed by his neighbour's cold, rough paws. Auntie licked his ear and in an effort to find a more comfortable position fidgeted about, crushing him under her cold paws, and accidentally poked

her head out of the coat, whereupon she at once growled in annoyance and plunged back into the stuffy darkness. It had seemed to her that she had seen a huge, badly lit room full of monsters; fearsome faces glared from behind the partitions and bars that flanked both sides of the room, faces with horse's teeth, with horns, with long ears, and even one great fat face with a tail instead of a nose and two long, well-gnawed bones jutting out of the mouth.

The cat miaowed hoarsely under Auntie's paws, but just then the coat was flung open, the master said: "Hoopla!" and Fyodor Timofeich and Auntie sprang down to the floor. They were now in a small room with grey, boarded walls; there was no other furniture but for a table with a looking-glass on it, a stool and bits of clothing hanging in various corners, and instead of a lamp or a candle it was illuminated by a bright, flaring light fixed to a tube in the wall. Fyodor Timofeich licked his coat, which Auntie had ruffled, crept under the stool and lay down. The master, still worried and rubbing his hands, began to undress... He undressed in the same way as he usually did when preparing to get into bed under the flannelette blanket, that is to say, he took off everything but his underclothes. But after that he sat down on the stool and, looking in the mirror, began to do the strangest things with himself. First of all he put on a wig with a parting in the middle and two rebellious tufts that looked like horns on either side, then he painted his face with something white and on top of this white paint drew eyebrows, a moustache and red cheeks. But this was not the end of his tricks. Having smeared his face and neck all over, he put on an altogether weird, outlandish costume the like of which Auntie had never seen anywhere before, at home or in the street. Imagine a pair of enormously baggy trousers made of the kind of cheap cotton print with large flowers on it that is used for curtains and chair-covers in suburban houses, trousers that come up right under the armpits; one leg is brown, the other light-yellow. Having engulfed himself in these, the master then put on a cotton jacket with a big star-shaped collar and a gold star on the back, different-coloured stockings, and green shoes.

Auntie's head and heart were in a whirl. The bulky white-faced figure smelled of her master, his voice was also familiar, but there were moments when she was tortured by doubts and wanted to run away from the gawky apparition and bark. The new place, the flaring light, the smell, the metamorphosis that had occurred in her master — all inspired her

with a vague sense of fear and a foreboding that she would be sure to encounter some horror like the great fat face with a tail instead of a nose. And to crown everything, from somewhere just on the other side of the wall came the hateful sound of music and, now and then, a strange roaring noise. The only thing that comforted her was Fyodor Timofeich's imperturbable calm. He was dozing quite peacefully under the stool and did not open his eyes even when the stool was moved.

A man in tails and a white waistcoat looked into the room and said: "Miss Arabella is just going on. You're next."

The master made no reply. He pulled a small suitcase out from under the table, sat down and waited. It was clear from his lips and hands that he was nervous, and Auntie felt the unsteadiness of his breathing.

"Monsieur Georges, if you please!" someone shouted from outside.

The master rose and crossed himself three times, then took the cat out from under the stool and put him in the suitcase.

"Come on, Auntie," he said quietly.

Completely baffled, Auntie stepped into his hands; he kissed her on the head and put her in the case next to Fyodor Timofeich. After that there was darkness... Auntie stamped on the cat, scratched the walls of the case and in her terror could not utter a sound; the case rocked like a ship at sea, and trembled...

"Here I am!" the master shouted loudly. "Here I am!"

After this shout Auntie felt the case hit something hard and stop rocking. The roaring sound was now continuous and very loud; somebody was being smacked and this someone — probably the face with a tail instead of a nose — was roaring and laughing so loudly that even the locks on the suitcase vibrated. In response to the roar the master gave a piercing, high-pitched cackle in a way he never did at home.

"Ha-ha!" he shouted, trying to make himself heard above the roar. "Esteemed ladies and gentlemen! I have just come from the station! My grandmother has pegged out and left me a legacy! There is something very heavy in this suitcase. It must be gold... Ha-ha! Suppose it's worth a million! Let us open it and see..."

The suitcase locks clicked. A bright light glared in Auntie's eyes; she jumped out of the case and, deafened by the noise, started dashing at full speed round her master, barking at the top of her voice.

"Aha!" he shouted. "Uncle Fyodor Timofeich! Dearest Auntie! My beloved relatives, would the devil take you!"

He flopped down on the sandy floor, grabbed the cat and Auntie and clasped them to his chest. While he was hugging her, Auntie had a glimpse of the world into which fate had thrown her and, overwhelmed by its grandeur, froze for a second in surprise and wonder, then tore herself free from her master's embrace and, overwhelmed by her impressions, went spinning round like a top. The new world was huge and full of brilliant light; everywhere she looked, from floor to ceiling, there was nothing but faces, faces, faces.

"Auntie, will you please sit down!" the master shouted.

Remembering what this meant, Auntie jumped on to a chair and sat. She looked at her master. The expression in his eyes was serious and tender as usual, but his face, particularly the mouth and teeth, was disfigured by a broad, fixed grin. He kept guffawing, hopping about, jerking his shoulders and pretending he felt very gay in the presence of all these thousands of faces. Auntie believed in his gaiety, suddenly felt in every fibre of her being that these thousands of faces were all looking at her, raised her foxy little muzzle and broke into a joyful howl.

"Now you just sit there, Auntie," the master told her, "while Uncle and I dance the Kamarinskaya together."

In expectation of the moment when he would be forced to do something silly, Fyodor Timofeich had been looking on with an air of complete indifference. He danced languidly, casually, sullenly, and it was obvious from his movements, his tail and whiskers that he had a profound contempt for the crowd, the brilliant lights, the master, and himself... Having done his share of dancing, he yawned and sat down.

"Now then, Auntie," the master said, "first you and I will sing a song, then we'll dance. How about it?"

He took a little pipe out of his pocket and began to play. Auntie, with her usual dislike of music, fidgeted on her chair and broke into a howl. Roars of approval and clapping came from all sides. The master bowed and, when all was quiet, went on playing. When he struck one very high note, someone somewhere in the gallery gave a loud exclamation of surprise.

"Dad!" a child's voice shouted. "That's Kashtanka!"

"Kashtanka it is!" a husky, drink-soaked tenor voice affirmed. "Kash-

tanka! Well, I'll be damned, Fedya, if that isn't Kashtanka! Hiyup!"

Someone in the gallery whistled and two voices, one a child's, the other, a man's, shouted loudly: "Kashtanka! Kashtanka!"

Auntie gave a start and looked in the direction of the shouts. Two faces, one hairy, drunk and grinning, the other, chubby, red-cheeked and frightened, flashed in her eyes, just as the brilliant lights had done. She remembered, fell off the chair and went rolling over and over in the sand, then jumped to her feet and with a joyful squeal dashed towards the two faces. There was a deafening roar mingled with whistles and the piercing sound of a child's voice shouting: "Kashtanka! Kashtanka!"

Auntie leapt the barrier, skipped over someone's shoulder and found herself in a box; to reach the next tier she would have to jump a high wall; she jumped high but not high enough and slithered back down the wall. Then she was passed from hand to hand, licking hands and faces as she went and moving higher and higher until, finally, she reached the gallery...

Half an hour later Kashtanka was walking along the street behind two people who smelled of glue and varnish. Luka Alexandrych was swaying and with an instinct, born of long experience, keeping as far as possible from the road-ditch.

"In the abyss of sin I lie, even in my very womb..." he was muttering. "And you, Kashtanka, are just a misunderstanding. Compared to a human being you're no more than what a carpenter is to a joiner."

Fedya was marching along beside him in his father's cap. Kashtanka gazed up at their backs as she trotted behind them and it seemed to her that she had been following them happily like this for a very long time, and that her life had not been interrupted for a single minute.

She remembered the little room with the dingy wallpaper, the goose, Fyodor Timofeich, the tasty dinners, the training, the circus, but now it was all no more than a long, confused, oppressive dream.

Ivan Turgenev

BEZHIN MEADOW

(From the book *A Hunter's Sketches*)
Edited by *Olga Shartse*

The book entitled *A Hunter's Sketches* by Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), then a little-known author, came out in 1852. It was made up of short stories which gave readers a picture of Central Russia in all its beauty and uniqueness, with its rye fields, old villages, filthy inns, sunlit woods, gently flowing rivers, wide country roads, and picturesque characters — in the main serf peasants, illiterate but strikingly gifted men, pure of heart and full of wisdom. The book brought the author country-wide fame.

Several stories from this book, among them "Bezhin Meadow", "Biryuk", "Lgov", and "The Singers", were published as children's reading. The short story "Mumu" has become a classic. At the request of Lev Tolstoy, Turgenev wrote the short story "The Quail" for the magazine *Children's Leisure*. He also translated into Russian the tales of Charles Perrault and published them with his own foreword.

It was a glorious July day, the sort of day that promises a long spell of fine weather. From earliest morning the sky is clear; the sunrise does not flame with fire but suffuses the sky with a soft roseate flush. The sun, not fiery, not red-hot as in time of stifling drought, not dull purple as before a storm, but with a bright and genial radiance, rises peacefully behind a long and narrow cloud, shines out freshly, and plunges again into its lilac mist. The delicate upper edge of the strip of cloud flashes in little gleaming snakes; their brilliance is like beaten silver... But, lo! The dancing rays flash forth again, and in solemn joy, as though flying upward, rises the mighty orb. About midday there is wont to appear, high up in the sky, a multitude of rounded clouds, golden-grey, with soft white edges. Like islands scattered over an overflowing river, that holds them in its arms of ever transparent blue, they scarcely stir; farther down the heavens they are in movement, packing closer, there is no blue to be seen between them, but they are themselves almost as blue as the sky, filled with light and warmth. The colour of the horizon, a faint pale lilac, does not change all day, and is the same all round; nowhere is there storm gathering and darkening; only in places streaks of bluish colour stretch down from the sky: it is a sparkling of thin, thin rain. In the evening these clouds disappear; the last of them, dark and undefined as smoke, settle in pink piles on the horizon opposite the setting sun; in the place where the sun has gone down, as calmly as it rose, a crimson glow lingers briefly over the darkening earth, and the evening star, softly flickering like a candle carried by a cautious hand, flashes on in the sky. On such days all the colours are softened, bright but not glaring; everything is suffused with a touching tenderness. On such days the heat is sometimes very great; often it is even "steaming hot" on the slopes of the fields, but a wind dispels this growing sultriness, and whirling eddies of dust — sure sign of settled fine weather — move along the roads and across the fields in tall white columns. In the pure dry air there is a scent of wormwood, harvested rye and buckwheat; even an hour before nightfall there is no dampness in the air. It is for such weather that the farmer longs, for harvesting his wheat...

On just such a day I was once out grouse-shooting in the Chern Uyezd of Tula Gubernia. I shot a fair amount of game; my full game-bag cut my shoulder mercilessly; but already the evening glow had faded, and the cool shades of twilight were beginning to grow thicker and spread in the air, which was still light though no longer illumined by the rays of the set-

ting sun, when I at last decided to turn back homewards. With swift steps I passed through the long "square" of brush, clambered up a hill, and instead of the familiar plain I expected to see, with the oak wood on the right and the little white church in the distance, I saw before me a scene completely different, and quite new to me. A narrow valley lay at my feet, and directly facing me a dense wood of aspen-trees rose up like a tall wall. I stood still in perplexity, looked round me... "Aha!" I thought. "I have somehow come wrong; I kept too much to the right," and surprised at my own mistake, I rapidly descended the hill. I was at once plunged into a disagreeable clinging dampness, exactly as though I had gone down into a cellar; the thick high grass at the bottom of the valley, all drenched with dew, was white like a smooth table-cloth: one felt afraid somehow to walk on it. I made haste to get on the other side and walked along beside the aspen wood, bearing to the left. Bats were already flitting over the slumbering tree-tops, mysteriously circling and quivering across the clear obscure of the sky; a young belated hawk flew in a swift, straight course upwards, hastening to its nest. "When I get to this corner," I said to myself, "I shall find the road at once; but I have come a mile out of my way!"

I did at last reach the end of the wood, but there was no road of any sort there: some kind of low brushwood overgrown with long grass extended far and wide before me; behind it in the far, far distance I could see a desolate field. I stopped again. "Well? Where am I?" I began ransacking my brain to recall how and where I had been walking during the day... "Ah! But this is the Parakhin brushwood," I cried at last. "Of course! Then this must be Sindeyev Copse. But how did I get here? So far?.. Strange! Now I must bear to the right again."

I went to the right through the bushes. Meantime the night had crept close and grown up like a storm-cloud; it seemed as though, with the mists of evening, darkness was rising up on all sides and even flowing down from overhead. I had come upon some sort of untrodden, overgrown path; I walked along it, peering intently ahead. Soon all was blackness and silence around — only the quail's cry was heard from time to time. Some small night-bird, flitting noiselessly near the ground on its soft wings, almost flapped against me and dived aside in alarm. I came out on the further side of the brushwood and made my way across a field. By now I could hardly make out distant objects; the field made a dimly-white blur; beyond it rose a sullen darkness, its huge masses moving up closer

every instant. My steps made a hollow sound in the air that grew increasingly colder. The pale sky began again to grow blue — but it was the blue of night. Tiny stars glimmered and twinkled in it.

What I had been taking for a copse turned out to be a dark round hillock. "But where am I, then?" I repeated again aloud, stopping dead for the third time and looking inquiringly at my spot-and-tan English dog, Dianka by name, certainly the most intelligent of all four-legged creatures. But this most intelligent of the four-legged creatures only wagged her tail, blinked her weary eyes dejectedly, and gave me no sensible advice. I felt ashamed before her and pushed desperately forward, as though I had suddenly guessed which way I ought to go; I scaled the hill and found myself in a hollow of no great depth, ploughed round. A strange sensation came over me at once.

The hollow had the form of an almost perfect cauldron, with sloping sides, at the bottom of it were several great white stones standing upright — they seemed to have crept down there for some secret council — and it was so still and dark there, so flat, and so dreary seemed the sky overhanging it, that my heart sank. Some little animal squeaked feebly and piteously among the stones. I made haste to get out again on to the hillock. Till then I had not quite given up hope of finding the way home; but at this point I finally decided that I was utterly lost, and without any further attempt to make out the surroundings, which were almost completely plunged in darkness, I walked straight forward, guided by the stars, at random... For about half an hour I walked in this way on dragging feet. I felt I had never been in such a deserted country in my life: nowhere was there the glimmer of light, nowhere a sound to be heard. One sloping hillside followed another; fields stretched endlessly; bushes seemed to spring up out of the earth under my very nose. I kept walking and was just making up my mind to lie down somewhere till morning, when suddenly I found myself on the edge of a horrible precipice.

I quickly drew back my lifted foot, and through the almost opaque darkness I saw before me a vast plain. A broad river skirted it in a semicircle, turning away from me; its course marked by the steely reflection of the water, still faintly glimmering here and there. The unexpectedly steep side of the hill on which I found myself stood out in a massive black shape against the bluish emptiness, and directly below me, in the corner formed by this precipice and the plain, beside the river, which under the lee of the

hill seemed a dark, motionless mirror, two fires were smoking and throwing up red flames side by side. People were puttering round them, their shadows wavered, and at moments the front of a small curly head was lighted up by the glow...

I found out at last where I had got to. This plain was well known in our parts under the name of Bezhin Meadow... But it was impossible to try and return home, especially at night: my legs were collapsing under me from weariness. I decided to get down to the fires and to wait for the dawn in the company of these men, whom I took for drovers. I got down successfully, but I had hardly let go of the last branch I had grasped, when suddenly two large shaggy white dogs rushed at me angrily barking. The sound of ringing boyish voices came from round the fires: two or three boys quickly got up from the ground. I called back in response to their shouts of inquiry. They ran up to me and at once called off the dogs, who were specially struck by the appearance of my Dianka.

I had mistaken the figures sitting round the fires for drovers. They were simply peasant boys from a neighbouring village, who were in charge of a herd of horses. In hot summer weather they drive the horses out at night to graze in the open country. The gadflies and gnats give them no peace in the daytime; so they drive out the horses towards evening, and drive them back in the early morning: it's a great treat for the peasant boys. Bare-headed, in old sheepskin coats, they sit astride the most spirited nags, and gallop along with merry cries, whoops and ringing laughter, swinging their arms and legs and leaping into the air. A fine dust rises in yellow clouds and moves along the road; the thudding of many hoofs resounds afar; the horses race along, pricking up their ears; in front of all, with his tail in the air and thistles in his tangled mane, tears along some shaggy chestnut, constantly changing his pace as he goes.

I told the boys I had lost my way and sat down with them. They asked me where I came from, then were silent for a little and made room for me. Then we talked a little. I lay down under a bush, whose shoots had been nibbled off, and began to look round. It was a marvellous picture: about the fires a red ring of light quivered and seemed to swoon away in the embrace of a background of darkness; the flame flaring up from time to time cast swift flashes of light beyond the boundary of this circle; a narrow tongue of light licked the leafless willow twigs and darted back at once; long thin shadows, in their turn, breaking in for an instant, reached

right up to the very fires; darkness was struggling with light. Sometimes, when the fire burnt low and the circle of light shrank together, suddenly out of the encroaching darkness a horse's head was thrust in, either a bay with striped markings, or all white, to stare with intent blank eyes upon us, busily munching a tuft of long grass, and bending down again, vanish instantly. The munching and snorting was all one could still hear. From the circle of light it was hard to make out what was going on in the darkness and everything close at hand seemed shut off by an almost black curtain; but farther away hills and forests were dimly visible in long blurs upon the horizon. The dark unclouded sky stood inconceivably immense and solemn above us in all its mysterious majesty. You felt a sweet catch in your throat as you breathed in that peculiar, overpowering, yet fresh fragrance — the fragrance of a summer night in Russia. Scarcely a sound was to be heard around. Now and then, a big fish would give a sudden splash in the river, and the reeds by the bank would rustle, swaying lightly as the ripples reached it... Only the fires kept up a subdued cracking.

The boys sat round the fires; there, too, sat the two dogs who had been so eager to devour me. They could not reconcile themselves to my presence, and drowsily blinking and looking askance at the fire, they growled now and then with a great sense of their own dignity; first they growled, and then whined a little, as though deploring the impossibility of carrying out their desires. There were altogether five boys: Fedya, Pavlusha, Ilyusha, Kostya and Vanya. (From their talk I learnt their names, and I intend now to introduce them to the reader.)

The first and eldest of all, Fedya, you would think was about fourteen. He was a well-made boy, with delicate, rather small features, curly fair hair, grey eyes, and a perpetual half-absent smile. He belonged, by all appearances, to a well-to-do family, and had ridden out to the meadow not through necessity, but for amusement. He wore a gay print shirt, with a yellow border; a short new overcoat was slung, all but slipping, over his narrow shoulders; a comb hung from his blue belt. His boots, coming a little way up the leg, were certainly his own — not his father's. The second boy, Pavlusha, had tangled black hair, grey eyes, broad cheekbones, a pale, pockmarked face, and a large but well-shaped mouth; his head was too large — "a bear-barrel head", as they say — and his figure was square and clumsy. He was not a good-looking boy — there's no denying it! — and yet I liked him: he looked very sensible and straightforward,

and there was a vigorous ring in his voice. He had nothing to boast of in his attire: it consisted simply of a homespun shirt and patched trousers. The face of the third, Ilyusha, was rather uninteresting: it was a long face, with short-sighted eyes and a hook-nose; it expressed a kind of dull, fretful uneasiness; his tightly-drawn lips seemed rigid; his knitted brow never relaxed; he seemed to be continually blinking from the firelight. His flaxen — almost white — hair hung in thin wisps from under his low felt hat, which he kept pulling down over his ears with both hands. He had on new bast shoes and cloth hose; a thick rope wound three times round his waist held together his neat black smock. Neither he nor Pavlusha looked more than twelve years old. The fourth, Kostya, a boy of ten, aroused my curiosity by his thoughtful and sorrowful look. His face was small, thin, freckled, pointed at the chin like a squirrel's; his lips you hardly noticed; but his great black eyes, shining with liquid brilliance, produced a strange impression: they seemed to be trying to express something for which the tongue — his tongue, at least — had no words. He was undersized and weakly, and dressed rather poorly. The remaining boy, Vanya, I had not noticed at first: he was lying on the ground, peacefully curled up under a square mat, and only occasionally thrust out from under it his curly brown head. This boy was seven years old at the most.

So I lay under the bush and looked at the boys. A small pot was hanging over one of the fires; potatoes were boiling in it. Pavlusha was in charge; kneeling down he poked a splinter into the potatoes to see if they were done. Fedya lay leaning on his elbow, the skirts of his coat flung out. Ilyusha sat beside Kostya, screwing up his eyes tensely all the time. Kostya's head drooped despondently, and he looked away into the distance. Vanya did not stir under his mat. I pretended to be asleep. Little by little, the boys began talking again.

At first they chatted of one thing and another, the work to be done tomorrow, the horses; but suddenly Fedya turned to Ilyusha, and, as though taking up again an interrupted conversation, asked him:

"So you say you've seen the goblin?"

"No, I didn't see him, and no one ever can see him," answered Ilyusha in a weak hoarse voice the sound of which was wonderfully in keeping with the expression of his face. "I heard him. Yes, and not I alone."

"Where does he live?" asked Pavlusha.

"In the old paper-mill."

"Why, do you go to the factory?"

"Of course we do. My brother Avdyushka and I, we are paper-glazers."

"Look at that! Factory-hands!"

"And how did you hear him?" asked Fedya.

"It was like this. It happened that I and my brother Avdyushka, with Fyodor Mikheyev, and Crosseyed Ivashka, and the other Ivashka who comes from Red Hills, and Ivashka Sukhorukov, too — and there were some other boys there as well — there were about ten of us boys there altogether — the whole shift, that is; it happened that we spent the night at the paper-mill; that's to say, it didn't happen, but Nazarov, the overseer, kept us. 'Why should you waste time going home, boys?' he said. 'There's a lot of work tomorrow, so don't go home, boys.' So we stayed, and were all lying down together, and Avdyushka had just begun to say, 'Now suppose the goblin were to come?' And before he'd finished saying this, someone suddenly began walking over our heads; we were lying down below, and he began walking upstairs overhead, where the wheel is. We listened: he walked; the boards seemed to be bending under him, they creaked so; then he crossed over, above our heads, all of a sudden the water began to gush over the wheel; the wheel rattled and rattled and began to turn, though the sluices had been let down. We wondered who could have raised them so the water could run; anyway, the wheel turned and turned a while, and then stopped. Then he went to the door and began coming downstairs, and came down, not hurrying himself; the stairs seemed to groan under him, too... Well, he came right down to our door, and waited and waited ... and all of a sudden the door simply flew open. We jumped up, looked — there was nothing... Suddenly the net on one of the vats began moving; it got up and went rising and ducking and moving in the air as though someone were waving with it, and then it was in its place again. Then, at another vat, a hook came off its nail, and then was on its nail again; and then it seemed as if someone came to the door and suddenly coughed and choked like a sheep, but so loudly. We all fell down in a heap and huddled against one another... Didn't we get a fright that night!"

"I say!" murmured Pavlusha. "What did he cough for?"

"I don't know, perhaps it was the damp."

All were silent for a while.

"Well," inquired Fedya, "are the potatoes done?"

Pavlusha tried them.

"No, they're still raw... My, what a splash!" he added, turning his face in the direction of the river. "That must be a pike... And there's a star falling."

"I say, I can tell you something, brothers," began Kostya in a shrill little voice. "Listen what my Dad told us the other day."

"Well, we are listening," said Fedya with a patronising air.

"You know Gavrila, I suppose, the carpenter up in the big village?"

"Yes, we know him."

"And do you know why he is so glum always, never says a word? Do you know? I'll tell you why he's so glum; he went one day, Daddy said, he went into the forest nutting. So he went nutting into the forest and lost his way — God knows where he got to. So he went on and on, brothers — but it was no good! — he could not find the way; and so night came on. So he sat down under a tree. 'I'll wait till morning,' thought he. He sat down and began to drop asleep. As he was falling asleep, suddenly he heard someone call him. He looked up: there was no one. He fell asleep again; again he was called. He looked and looked again: and in front of him there sat a mermaid on a branch, sitting as on swings, and calling him to her, and simply dying with laughter; she laughed so... And the moon was shining bright, so bright, the moon shone so clear — everything could be seen plain, brothers. So she called him, and she herself was as bright and as white sitting on the branch as a dace or a roach, or like a little carp, so white and silvery... Gavrila the carpenter was scared stiff, brothers, but she laughed without stopping, and kept beckoning him to her like this. Then Gavrila got up; he wanted to go up to the mermaid, brothers, but — the Lord put him wise, it seems — he crossed himself... And it was so hard for him to make that cross, brothers; he said, 'My hand was heavy as stone, it would not move.' Ugh! the horrid witch!.. So when he made the cross, brothers, the mermaid, she left off laughing, and all at once now she began to cry... She cried, brothers, and wiped her eyes with her hair, and her hair was green as hemp. So Gavrila looked and looked at her, and at last he asked her, 'Why are you weeping, wild thing of the woods?' And the mermaid spoke to him like this: 'If you had not crossed yourself, man,' she says, 'you should have lived with me in gladness of heart to the end of your days; and I weep, I am grieved because you crossed yourself, but

I will not grieve alone: you, too, shall grieve to the end of your days.' Then she vanished, and at once it was plain to Gavrila how to get out of the forest... Only since then he's always been so glum."

"Funny!" said Fedya after a brief silence. "How can such an evil thing of the woods ruin a Christian soul — he did not listen to her!"

"There it is," said Kostya. "Gavrila said that her voice was as shrill and plaintive as a toad's."

"Did your father tell you that himself?" Fedya went on.

"Yes. I was lying on the stove-bed, I heard it all."

"It's a strange thing. Why should he be so glum?.. She must have liked him, since she called him."

"She liked him!" Ilyusha broke in. "Don't you believe it! She wanted to tickle him to death, that's what she wanted. That's what they do, those mermaids."

"There ought to be mermaids here, too," observed Fedya.

"No," answered Kostya, "this is a clear, open place. There's one thing though: the river's near."

All were silent. Suddenly from out of the distance came a prolonged, resonant, almost wailing sound, one of those inexplicable sounds of the night, which break upon a profound stillness, rise upon the air, linger, and then slowly die away. You listen: it is as though there were nothing, yet it echoes still. It is as though someone had uttered a long, long cry upon the very horizon, as though someone else had responded with shrill harsh laughter in the forest, and a faint, hoarse hissing hovers over the river. The boys exchanged frightened looks...

"Christ be with us!" whispered Ilyusha.

"Ah, you craven crows!" cried Pavlusha. "What are you frightened of? Look, the potatoes are done." (They all came up to the pot and began to eat the hot potatoes; only Vanya did not stir.) "Well, aren't you coming?" said Pavlusha.

But Vanya did not crawl out from under his mat. The pot was soon completely emptied.

"Have you heard, boys," began Ilyusha, "what happened with us at Varnavitsy the other day?"

"Near the dam?" asked Fedya.

"Yes, yes, near the dam, the broken-down one. That is a haunted place right enough, and so lonely. All round there are pits and ravines, and there are always snakes in ravines."

"Well, what did happen? Tell us."

"Well, this is what happened. Maybe you don't know, Fedya, but there a drowned man was buried; he was drowned long, long ago, when the pond was still deep; only his grave can still be seen, though it can only just be seen ... just a little mound... So one day the bailiff called the huntsman Yermil, and says to him: 'Go to the post, Yermil.' Yermil always rides to collect the mail for us; all his dogs died; they just don't live with him, for some reason, and they have never lived with him, though he's a good huntsman, and everyone likes him. So Yermil went to the post, and he stayed a bit in town, and when he started back, he was a little tipsy. It was night, a clear night: the moon was shining... So Yermil rode across the dam: his way lay there. So, as he rode along, he saw, on the drowned man's grave, a little lamb, so white and curly and pretty, running about. So Yermil thought, 'I will take him, he'll just perish here,' and he got down and took him in his arms. Well, the lamb didn't seem to mind. So Yermil goes back to his horse, but the horse stares at him, and snorts and shakes his head; however, he calmed him and mounted him with the lamb, and rode on again; he held the lamb in front of him. He looks at him, and the lamb looks him straight in the eye. Yermil was scared, and thought: 'I don't remember lambs ever looking at any one like that.' Then he began to stroke it like this and to say, 'Chucky! chucky!' And the lamb suddenly showed its teeth and said too, 'Chucky! chucky!'"

The boy had hardly uttered this last word when suddenly both dogs got up, and, barking convulsively, rushed away from the fire and disappeared in the darkness. All the boys were alarmed, Vanya jumped up from under his mat, Pavlusha ran shouting after the dogs. Their barking quickly grew fainter in the distance... There was the noise of the uneasy tramp of the frightened horses. Pavlusha shouted: "Hey, Sery! Zhuchka!" In a few minutes the barking ceased; Pavlusha's voice already came from afar... A little more time passed; the boys kept looking at each other in perplexity, as though expecting something to happen. Suddenly the thudding of a galloping horse was heard; it stopped short by the fire, and Pavlusha who had been hanging on to the mane, jumped nimbly down. Both the dogs also leapt into the circle of light and at once sat down, their red tongues hanging out.

"What was it? What was it?" asked the boys.

"Nothing," answered Pavlusha, waving his horse away. "The dogs

scented something. I thought it was a wolf," he added calmly, drawing deep breaths.

I could not help admiring Pavlusha. He was very fine at that moment. His plain face, animated by his swift ride, glowed with hardihood and determination. Without even a switch in his hand, he had, without the slightest hesitation, rushed out into the night alone to face a wolf. "What a splendid fellow!" I thought, looking at him.

"Have you seen any wolves, then?" asked the cowardly Kostya.

"There are always a good many of them here," answered Pavlusha, "but they only make trouble in the winter."

He crouched down again before the fire. As he sat down on the ground, he laid his hand on the shaggy head of one of the dogs. For a long while, the flattered dog did not turn his head, gazing sidewise with grateful pride at Pavlusha.

Vanya crawled under his mat again.

"What horrors you were telling us, Ilyusha!" began Fedya, who being the son of a well-to-do peasant, was expected to keep the conversation rolling. He spoke little himself, apparently afraid of lowering his dignity. "And then something set the dogs barking... I did hear talk that that place of yours was haunted."

"Varnavitsy?.. I should think it was haunted! More than once, they say, they have seen the old master there — the late master. He wears, they say, a long coat, and keeps groaning and looking for something on the ground. Once grandfather Trofimych met him. 'What are you looking for on the ground, good sir, Ivan Ivanych?' "

"He asked him?" put in Fedya in amazement.

"Yes, he asked him."

"Well, I call Trofimych a brave fellow after that... Well, and what did he say?"

"'I am looking for the herb that can rip up everything,' says he. And his voice is so hollow. 'And what, good sir, Ivan Ivanych, do you want with the herb that can rip up everything?' 'The tomb weighs on me; it weighs on me, Trofimych; I want to get away — away.' "

"My word!" observed Fedya. "He didn't get enough living, I suppose."

"What a marvel!" said Kostya. "I thought one could only see the dead men on Remembrance Saturdays."

"One can see dead men any time," Ilyusha interposed with conviction. From what I could observe, he knew the village superstitions better than the others. "But on Remembrance Saturdays you can see the living too; those, that is, whose turn it is to die that year. You need only sit on the church porch and keep looking at the road. They will come by you along the road; those, that is, who will die that year. Last year old Ulyana went to the porch."

"Well, did she see anyone?" asked Kostya inquisitively.

"Sure she did. At first she saw no one and heard nothing for a long, long time... Only she seemed to hear a dog kept barking somewhere... Suddenly she saw a boy coming along the road with only a shirt on. She looked at him. It was Ivashka Fedoseyev."

"Who died in the spring?" asked Fedya.

"That's the one. He came along and never lifted up his head. But Ulyana knew him. And then she looked again: a woman came along. She stared and stared at her... Good God, it was herself coming along the road, Ulyana herself."

"Could it be herself?" asked Fedya.

"Yes, herself."

"But she is not dead yet, is she?"

"But the year is not over yet. And only look at her: her life hangs by a thread."

All were still again. Pavlusha threw a handful of dry twigs on the fire. They looked black against the suddenly leaping flame; they cracked and smoked, and began to curl up, lifting their burned ends. A quivering reflection of light flashed in all directions, especially upwards. Suddenly, a white dove flew straight into this reflected light, fluttered round and round in terror, bathed in the red glow, and disappeared with a whirr of its wings.

"It's lost its home, I suppose," remarked Pavlusha. "Now it will fly till it gets somewhere, where it can rest till dawn."

"Why, Pavlusha," said Kostya, "might it not be a righteous soul flying to heaven?"

Pavlusha threw another handful of twigs on the fire.

"Might be," he said at last.

"But tell us, please, Pavlusha," began Fedya, "did you in Shalamovo also see the heavenly portent?"

"When the sun could not be seen? Yes, indeed."

"Were you frightened, too?"

"And we weren't the only ones either. Our master, though he talked to us beforehand and said there would be a heavenly portent, yet when it got dark, they say he himself was frightened out of his wits. And in the house-serfs' cottage the cook woman, directly it grew dark, broke all the pots in the oven with the poker. 'Who will eat now?' she said. 'The last day has come.' So the soup was running all over everything. And in the village there was talk that white wolves would run over the earth and would eat men, that a bird of prey would pounce down on us, and that they would even see Trishka."

"Who is Trishka?" asked Kostya.

"Why, don't you know?" interrupted Ilyusha warmly. "Why, brother, where have you come from not to know Trishka? Don't you ever get to hear anything in your village? Honestly! Trishka is a wonder, who will appear when the last days come. And he will be such a wonder of a man that no one will ever be able to catch him, and never be able to do anything to him: that's the kind of man he is. The people will try to seize him, they will come after him with clubs, they will surround him, but he will blind their eyes so they'll fall upon one another. Or, say, they will put him in prison, he will ask for a little water to drink in a bowl; they will bring him the bowl, and he will plunge into it and vanish from their sight. They will put him in chains, but he will only flutter his hands — and the chains will fall off him. So this Trishka will go through villages and towns; and this Trishka will be a wily man: he will lead Christian folk into temptation ... and they won't be able to do anything to him... He will be such a wily man."

"Well, then," continued Pavlusha in his deliberate voice, "that's he's like. And so they expected him in our parts. The old men declared that directly the heavenly portent began, Trishka would come. So the heavenly portent began. All the people poured out into the street, into the open, waiting to see what would happen. Our place, you know, is open country. They look: and suddenly down the slope from the big village comes a man, such a strange man, with such a queer head that everyone screams, 'Trishka is coming! Trishka is coming!' and runs into hiding! Our elder crawled into a ditch; his wife got stuck in the gate and screamed at the top of her voice, frightening her own watch-dog so that he

broke his chain, jumped over the fence and ran away into the forest; and Kuzka's father, Dorofeyich, made for the oats, crouched down there, and began to cry like a quail, thinking: 'Perhaps, the Enemy, the Destroyer of Souls, will spare the bird, at least.' The scare was something terrible! And the man that was coming was our cooper Vavila: he had bought himself a new tub and had put it over his head."

All the boys laughed, and again there was a silence for a while, as often happens when people are talking in the open air. I looked about me into the solemn, majestic stillness of the night; the dewy freshness of late evening had been succeeded by the dry warmth of midnight; the darkness still had long to lie in a soft curtain over the slumbering fields; there was still a long while left before the first rustlings and whisperings of the morning, the first dewdrops. There was no moon in the heavens: it rose late at that time of the year. Countless golden stars, twinkling in rivalry, seemed all floating softly towards the Milky Way, and looking at them, you almost felt the never-resting motion of the earth.

A strange, harsh, painful cry sounded twice over the river, and a few moments later, was repeated farther down...

Kostya shuddered. "What was that?"

"That was a heron's cry," replied Pavlusha tranquilly.

"A heron," repeated Kostya. "And what was it, Pavlusha, I heard yesterday evening?" he added after a short pause. "Perhaps you will know."

"What did you hear?"

"I will tell you what I heard. I was going from Stony Ridge to Shashkino; I went first through our hazel grove, and then passed by a little meadow — you know where there's a sharp turn down to the ravine — there is a waterpit there, you know; it is quite overgrown with reeds; so I went near this pit, brothers, and suddenly from it came a sound of someone groaning, and so piteously: oo-oo, oo-oo! I was in such a fright, brothers: it was late, and the voice was so miserable. I felt as if I could cry myself... What could that have been, eh?"

"It was in that pit the thieves drowned Akim the forester last summer," observed Pavlusha, "so perhaps it was his soul lamenting."

"Oh, dear, really, brothers," said Kostya, opening wide his already round eyes, "I did not know they had drowned Akim in that pit. I'd have been frightened even more if I'd known!"

"But they also say there are little, tiny frogs," continued Pavlusha, "who cry piteously like that."

"Frogs? Oh, no, it was not frogs, certainly not..." The heron again uttered a cry above the river. "Ugh, just listen to it!" Kostya cried involuntarily. "It is just like a wood-spirit shrieking."

"The wood-spirit does not shriek, it is dumb," put in Ilyusha, "it only claps its hands and rattles."

"And have you seen it then, the wood-spirit?" Fedya asked him ironically.

"No, I have not seen it, and God preserve me from seeing it, but others have seen it. Why, the other day it fixed on a peasant in our parts, and led him through the woods in circles, and all around one and the same clearing... He scarcely got home by daylight."

"Well, and did he see it?"

"Yes. He says it was a big, big creature, dark, shapeless, as if it were standing behind a tree, you could not make it out well; it seemed to hide away from the moon, and kept staring and staring with its great eyes, and blinking and blinking..."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Fedya with a slight shiver, and a shrug of the shoulders. "Horrid!"

"And how come such nastiness lives in the world at all?" said Pavlusha. "It's beyond me."

"Don't speak ill of it: take care, it will hear you," said Ilyusha.

Again there was a silence.

"Look, look, lads," suddenly came Vanya's childish voice, "look at God's little stars, they are swarming like bees!"

He poked out his young face from under his mat, leaned on his fist, and slowly lifted up his large soft eyes. The eyes of all the boys were raised to the sky, and they were not lowered quickly.

"Tell me, Vanya," asked Fedya gently, "is your sister Anyutka well?"

"Yes, she is well," replied Vanya with a slight lisp.

"You ask her, why doesn't she come to see us?"

"I don't know."

"You tell her to come."

"Very well."

"Tell her I have a present for her."

"And for me, too?"

"Yes, you, too."

Vanya sighed.

"No, I don't want one. Better give it to her: she is so nice and kind."

And Vanya laid his head down on the ground again. Pavlusha got up and took the empty pot in his hand.

"Where are you going?" Fedya asked him.

"To the river, to get water: I want a drink."

The dogs got up and followed him.

"Take care you don't fall into the river!" Ilyusha cried after him.

"Why should he fall in?" said Fedya. "He will be careful."

"Yes, he will be careful. But all kinds of things happen: he will stoop over to draw the water, and the water-spirit will clutch him by the hand, and drag him into the depths. Then they will say, 'The boy fell into the water.' Fell in, indeed!.. There, he has gone in among the reeds," he added, listening.

The reeds rustled as they were parted.

"But is it true," asked Kostya, "that Akulina has been mad ever since she fell into the water?"

"Yes, ever since... Look at her now! But they say she was a beauty before then. The water-spirit bewitched her. I suppose he did not expect they would get her out so soon. So down there at the bottom he bewitched her."

(I had seen this Akulina more than once. Covered with rags, fearfully thin, with a face as black as coal, her eyes glazed and her teeth ever bared, she shuffled her feet for hours in one place in the road, pressing her bony hands to her breast, and slowly shifting from one leg to the other, like a wild beast in a cage. She understood nothing that was said to her, and only chuckled spasmodically from time to time.)

"But they say," continued Kostya, "that Akulina threw herself into the river because her lover had deceived her."

"Yes, that was it."

"And do you remember Vasya?" added Kostya mournfully.

"What Vasya?" asked Fedya.

"Why, the one who was drowned," replied Kostya, "in this very river. Ah, what a boy he was! What a boy he was! His mother, Feklista, how she loved him, her Vasya! And she seemed to have a foreboding, Feklista did, that harm would come to him from the water. Sometimes, when Vasya went with us boys in the summer to bathe in the river, she'd be in a proper dither. The other mothers did not care, they'd waddle past with the wash-

tubs, but Feklista would put her tub down on the ground and start calling him, 'Come back, come back, my little joy! Come back, my darling!' And no one knows how he was drowned. He was playing on the bank, and his mother was there raking hay; suddenly she heard a sound as if someone was blowing bubbles, and there was only Vasya's little cap floating on the water. You know since then Feklista has not been right in her mind: she goes and lies down at the place where he was drowned; she lies down, brothers, and sings a song — you remember Vasya was always singing a song like that — so she sings it, too, and weeps and weeps, and bitterly complains to God..."

"Here is Pavlusha coming," said Fedya.

Pavlusha came up to the fire with a full pot of water.

"Boys," he began after a short silence, "something bad's afoot."

"Oh, what?" asked Kostya hurriedly.

"I heard Vasya's voice."

They were jolted.

"What do you mean?" stammered Kostya.

"Really. I bent down to the water and suddenly I heard my name called in Vasya's voice, as though it came from below water: 'Pavlusha, Pavlusha, come here.' I walked away. But I fetched the water, anyway."

"Ah, God have mercy upon us!" said the boys, crossing themselves.

"It was the water-spirit calling you, Pavlusha," said Fedya. "We were just talking of Vasya."

"It's a bad omen," said Ilyusha weightily.

"Well, never mind, don't bother about it," Pavlusha declared stoutly, and sat down again. "No one can escape his fate."

The boys were silent. It was clear that Pavlusha's words had produced a strong impression on them. One after the other they lay down around the fire as though preparing to go to sleep.

"What is that?" asked Kostya, suddenly lifting his head.

Pavlusha listened.

"It's the curlews flying and whistling."

"Where are they flying to?"

"To a land where, they say, there is no winter."

"But is there such a land?"

"Yes."

"Is it far away?"

"Far, far away, beyond the warm seas."

Kostya sighed and shut his eyes.

More than three hours had passed since I joined the boys. The moon at last had risen; I did not notice it at first: so small and thin it was. This moonless night seemed magnificent as ever... But already many of the stars, that only a short time ago had been high up in the sky, were setting over the earth's dark rim; everything around was perfectly still, as it is only still towards morning: everything was sleeping the deep unbroken sleep that comes before dawn. Already the fragrance in the air was fainter, a dampness seemed to be spreading through it... How short are nights in summer! The boys' talk died down as the fires did. Even the dogs were dozing; the horses, so far as I could make out in the faint, barely flickering light of the stars, were asleep with downcast heads... I fell into a state of weary drowsiness, which passed into sleep.

A fresh breeze ran over my face. I opened my eyes: the morning was beginning. The dawn had not yet flushed the sky, but already light was breaking in the east. Everything had become visible, if only dimly. The pale-grey sky was growing light and cold and blue; the stars dimmed and disappeared; the earth was wet, the leaves covered with dew, and from the distance came sounds of life and voices, and a faint morning breeze went fluttering over the earth. My body responded to it with a slight, joyous shivering. I got up quickly and went to the boys. They were all sleeping like the dead round the smouldering fire; only Pavlusha half rose and gazed intently at me.

I nodded to him, and walked homewards beside the misty river. Before I had walked a mile, streams of young warm light, first pink, then red and golden already flowed all around me, over the wide dew-drenched meadow, and ahead of me, where the hills were green again, from forest to forest, and behind me — over the long dusty road and the sparkling bushes, flushed with the red glow, and over the river, shyly blue now under the lifting mist... All things began to stir, to awaken, to sing, to flutter, to speak. On all sides thick drops of dew sparkled like diamonds; to welcome me, pure and clear as though bathed in the freshness of morning, came the notes of a bell, and suddenly there thudded past me the herd of horses, refreshed and rested, driven by the boys I had parted from...

Alas, I must add that in that year Pavlusha met his end. He was not drowned: he was killed by a fall from his horse. Pity! He was a splendid fellow!

Dmitri Mamin-Sibiryak

EMELYA THE HUNTER

Translated by *Amanda Calvert*

Dmitri Mamin (1852-1912), who wrote under the pen-name of Mamin-Sibiryak ("Sibiryak" meaning the Siberian), was born and spent most of his life in the Urals, a region of forests and comparatively low mountains. Iron foundries and steel works were set up in the Urals by Russian merchants in the reign of Peter the Great.

"I can still see our old wooden house with its five large windows overlooking the square," the writer recalled. "The remarkable thing about it was that on one side the windows faced Europe and on the other, Asia.

"'Those mountains over there are in Asia,' my father told me, pointing to the mountains on the horizon. 'We live right on the border.'"

A factory priest of moderate means, Mamin-Sibiryak's father had a passion for books and spent most of his salary on them. He passed on his love for literature to his son.

Mamin-Sibiryak wrote novels about the Ural merchants and factory owners and the peasants, who both ploughed the land and worked down the mines and in the factories. "This writer gives us a vivid account of everyday life in the Urals," Lenin noted.

Mamin-Sibiryak also wrote about a hundred and thirty stories for children. The best-known of these are an amusing animal book, *Alyonushka's Tales*, as well as the short stories "The Winter on the River Studyonaya", "The Adopted Child" and "Emelya the Hunter" (1884) included in this collection.

I

Hidden in dense forest, in the northern part of the Ural Mountains, was the small village of Tychki. It consisted of eleven homesteads or, to be more precise, of ten, for the eleventh hut stood by itself, right on the edge of the forest... A jagged wall of evergreen conifers rose up all round the village. Through the tops of the spruce and silver firs, several mountains could be made out whose huge, bluish-grey shapes hemmed Tychki in on all sides, as if on purpose. Standing closest of all to Tychki was hump-backed Mount Ruchyova. In dull weather its grey, shaggy crown was entirely hidden in clouds. Many springs and streams ran down the sides of Ruchyova, one of which flowed merrily through Tychki providing the villagers in winter and summer with crystal-clear, icy drinking water.

The houses in Tychki were put up pell-mell, without a plan of any sort, wherever their owners chose. Two houses stood right on the edge of the stream, another on the steep hillside, while the rest were scattered along the banks like sheep. There was no such thing as a street in Tychki, just a well-trodden path zigzagging between the houses. Indeed, the villagers had no need of a street, for not one of them had a cart. In summer the village was surrounded by impassable marsh, bogland and dense thickets, and it could only be reached on foot, walking along narrow paths through the forest, and not always even then. In wet weather the mountain streams would swell up and often Tychki hunters were forced to wait two or three days for the water in them to subside.

All the menfolk in Tychki were inveterate hunters. Winter and summer, they virtually lived in the forest, which was only a stone's throw away. Each season of the year brought a different sort of game: in winter, they hunted bears, martens, wolves and foxes; in the autumn — squirrels; in the spring — wild goats; and, in summer, fowl of all sorts. In a word, this tough and often dangerous work went on all the year round.

Living in the hut right on the edge of the forest were the old hunter Emelya and his small grandson, Grishutka. Emelya's hut had sunk into the ground and only had one window; its roof had rotted through long ago and all that remained of its chimney were a few loose bricks. It had neither fence, nor gate, nor shed. Under the steps made of rough logs, Lysko, one of the best gun-dogs in Tychki, would howl with hunger all night long. Emelya would starve the unfortunate animal for about three

days before each hunting expedition so that he would be keener to sniff out game and track down wild animals.

"Grandad, I say, Grandad," young Grishutka asked one evening, "do the deer have calves with them now?"

"Yes, they do, Grishutka," answered Emelya, who was plaiting himself a new pair of bast sandals.

"Will you get me one, Grandad?"

"I might, and all. The heat has set in, so hinds and calves will be hiding in the undergrowth from the gadflies. I'll do my best to bag a little 'un for you, Grishutka!"

Giving a deep sigh, the boy didn't answer. Speaking was an effort for him. Grishutka was only six, and for two months now he'd been lying on a wide, wooden bench, covered by a deerskin. He'd caught cold back in the spring when the snow was melting, and was still poorly. His face was white and drawn, his eyes had got bigger and his nose more pointed. Emelya watched his grandson wasting away and was at a loss how to make him better. He had dosed him with infusions of herbs and had carried him twice to the bath-house, but the little boy hadn't recovered. He ate almost nothing: he'd chew a crust of brown bread and that was all. There was still some salted goat meat left over from the spring, but Grishutka wouldn't touch it.

"Fancy him wanting a calf..." old Emelya thought, as he shaped his bast sandals. "I'll have to bag him one then."

Old Emelya was seventy; he was hunchbacked and thin, with grey hair and long arms. His fingers were as stiff as twigs and he could only bend them with difficulty.

But he still got about and rarely came back empty-handed when he went hunting. His eyes, though, were beginning to play him up, particularly in the winter when everything was under snow which sparkled and glittered like diamond dust. It was because of Emelya's poor eyesight that the chimney had fallen in and the roof had rotted. And this was also why he often remained at home when the other villagers were away in the forest.

It was time the old man gave up hunting and sat indoors keeping warm on the stove-bed, but there was no one to take his place and then he had Grishutka to look after. Grishutka's father had died three years ago from a fever and his mother had been killed by wolves returning home one win-

ter's evening from the village with young Grishutka. The child had been saved by a miracle. His mother had managed to shield him with her body while the wolves tore at her legs, and he had survived.

So old Emelya had been left to bring Grishutka up and now, to make matters worse, his grandson had fallen ill. It never rains but it pours.

II

It was the end of June, the hottest time of year in Tychki. Only the old and the very young were left at home. The hunters had gone off long ago into the forest after deer. At Emelya's hut poor Lysko had been howling with hunger, like a wolf in winter, for three days.

"Must mean Emelya's going hunting," the village women said.

And sure enough, Emelya soon came out of his hut carrying a flint-lock and, untying Lysko, set off for the forest. He had a knapsack with food on his back, and wore his new bast sandals and a torn caftan. On his head, he had a warm cap made of deerskin. The old man had long given up wearing hats, going about in winter and summer in his deerskin cap, which gave his bald head excellent protection from both the cold and the heat.

"Mind you get better while I'm gone," Emelya said to his grandson before he left. "Malanya will look after you while I'm off hunting."

"You will bring me back a calf, won't you, Grandad?"

"I said I would, didn't I?"

"A yellow one?"

"Yes."

"Ooh, I can't wait... Don't miss, will you?"

Emelya had long been meaning to go deer hunting, but had been loth to leave his grandson on his own. Now that the latter appeared to be better, the old man decided to try his luck. And old Malanya would keep an eye on the boy so it wasn't as if he was being left alone.

Emelya knew the forest like the back of his hand, which was hardly surprising for he had spent his whole life wandering through it with his gun and his dog. The old man knew all the paths and all the landmarks for a hundred versts around.

At this time of year, at the end of June, it was particularly pleasant in the forest: the grass was dotted with wild flowers, the air was full of sweet scents and a benign summer sun looked down from the sky, bathing the

trees, the grass, the gurgling stream and the distant mountains in its bright light.

It was a really beautiful day, and Emelya stopped more than once in order to get his breath and to look back over the way he had come.

The path along which he walked wound like a snake up the hill, avoiding large rocks and overhanging ledges. The forest had been cut down and growing along the path were young birch-trees, honeysuckle bushes and rowan-trees, their branches spreading out in a green awning. Here and there, on each side of the track were thick copses of young firs looking like green, bristly brushes. From about half-way up the hill, there was a marvellous view of the village and of the mountains in the distance: Tychki nestled at the bottom of a deep hollow and from here the peasant houses looked like black dots. Shielding his eyes from the sun, Emelya stared at his hut for a long time, thinking about his grandson.

"Fetch 'em out, Lysko," Emelya said, when they'd climbed down the hill and turned off the path into a dense thicket of fir-trees.

Lysko didn't need telling twice. He was an excellent gun-dog: keeping his sharp nose to the ground, he shot off into the green coppice. Only now and then could one see his yellow-spotted back flashing through the undergrowth.

The hunt had started.

The spiky tops of the huge fir-trees soared skywards, their interlocking shaggy branches forming a dark vault over Emelya's head. Occasionally a sunbeam managed to pierce through, dappling the yellowish moss or a wide fern leaf with golden spots of light. Grass doesn't grow in this sort of wood and Emelya walked over a carpet of soft, springy turf.

He spent several hours roaming through the forest. Lysko had vanished into thin air. Occasionally a twig crackled underfoot or a speckled woodpecker flew past. Emelya scrutinised everything round him for any telltale sign: for twigs broken by the deer's antlers, for the imprint of a cleft hoof-mark in the moss, or for chewed stems of grass. It was beginning to get dark, and the old man was tired: it was time to think about where to spend the night. "More likely than not, the deer have been frightened off by the other hunters," Emelya thought. Suddenly Lysko gave a low yelp and at some distance ahead twigs snapped. Emelya leant back against the trunk of a fir-tree and waited.

A stag appeared: a truly handsome beast with ten points to its antlers,

the most noble of all the animals living in the forest. Its antlers laid back on its spine, it was listening attentively, sniffing the air, ready at any minute to dart back into the green undergrowth.

Emelya saw the stag, but he was too far away from it to shoot. Lysko, who both heard and smelt it, lay in the thicket, trembling with excitement, waiting for the shot.

A shot rang out and the stag sprang forwards at the speed of lightning. Emelya had missed, Lysko let out a disappointed howl: the poor dog had been drooling at the mouth at the thought of the smell of roast venison and of the juicy bone his master would give him. And now he'd have to go to sleep hungry. A truly wretched state of affairs...

"Never mind," Emelya said, thinking aloud to himself later that evening, as he sat by a fire under the thick branches of a hundred-year-old fir-tree. "It's a calf we're after, Lysko ... d'you hear me?"

Giving a half-hearted wag of his tail, Lysko laid his long nose between his front paws. His ration for the day had been one dry crust thrown to him by Emelya.

III

Emelya wandered through the forest for three days without so much as catching a glimpse of a hind with calf. The old man was worn out, but he was reluctant to return home empty-handed. And though Lysko had managed to catch a pair of young hares, he'd lost his high spirits and looked really skinny.

Forced to spend a third night lying by a camp-fire in the forest, Emelya kept dreaming of the yellow calf his grandson had asked him for: he stalked after his prey, took careful aim, but each time the deer ran away from under his very nose. Lysko was probably dreaming of deer too for he yelped several times during the night and gave out muffled barks.

It was only on the fourth day, when the old man and his dog were just about at the point of collapse, that they suddenly came across signs of a hind and calf. They were in a dense thicket of fir-trees on the slope of a hill. Lysko first sought out the place where mother and calf had spent the night and then, nose to the ground, he set off on their trail.

"A hind and calf," Emelya thought to himself, examining the tracks of large and small hoof-prints in the grass. "She was here this morning right enough... Go on, Lysko, fetch 'em, that's a good dog!"

It was a stifling day: the sun beat down mercilessly. His tongue hanging out, Lysko was working through the bushes and the grass. Emelya's legs would hardly carry him. But then came a familiar crackling, rustling sound. Lysko crouched to the ground and froze. Emelya's ears were ringing with Grishutka's words: "Bring me back a calf, Grandad... A yellow one." And there, standing on the edge of the thicket, was a beautiful hind: she was staring timidly straight at Emelya. Gnats and flies swarmed round her, causing her to twitch.

"You aren't escaping me," Emelya thought, as he edged forward out of his cover.

Though the hind had caught his scent long ago, she boldly continued to watch his movements.

"She's leading me away from her calf," Emelya thought as he crawled closer and closer.

When the old man started to take aim, the hind ran a few yards further off and then stopped. Once more Emelya began crawling forward with his gun, stealing slowly up to her. And again the hind darted away before Emelya could fire.

"You won't leave your calf, that's for sure," Emelya said in a whisper and he went on patiently stalking the deer for several hours.

The battle between man and beast continued till nightfall. The noble animal risked her life ten times trying to lead Emelya away from her fawn. The old man was both angered and astonished by her courage. For either way she'd have it, this wasn't the first time he'd shot a hind sacrificing herself for the sake of her fawn! Lysko crawled after his master like a shadow, and when Emelya lost sight of the hind altogether, he nudged him cautiously with his hot nose.

Turning round the old man dropped to the ground. No more than twenty steps away from him, standing under a bush of honeysuckle, was the yellow fawn he'd been in search of for a whole three days. Only a few weeks old, the beautiful little animal was covered with yellow fur. It stood on thin legs, its red head thrown back. And when it wanted to reach one of the higher branches, it would stretch out its slender neck.

His heart standing still, Emelya cocked his gun and aimed at the small, defenceless creature's head.

A second later and the fawn would have fallen to the ground with a pitiful cry, but at this very moment the old hunter thought of the courage its

mother had shown in trying to protect it, and then he remembered how Grishutka's mother had sacrificed her life in order to save her son from the wolves. It was as if something had snapped inside him: Emelya lowered his gun. And the fawn went on walking round the bush, nibbling the leaves and alert to the slightest sound. Getting quickly to his feet, Emelya gave a whistle, at which the small creature disappeared with lightning speed into the bushes.

"He's a fast mover," the old man said with a rueful smile. "Off like the wind... We've lost our calf, Lysko! He's still got a spot of growing to do... He's fast though, there's no doubt about that!"

The old man stood where he was for a long time, smiling as he thought about the fawn he'd let go.

The next day, Emelya arrived back at his hut.

"Well, Grandad, have you brought me a deer calf?" Grishutka asked. He'd been waiting impatiently for the old man's return.

"No, lad... I saw one, though..."

"Was it yellow?"

"Yes, with a black muzzle. It was standing under a bush nibbling the leaves. I was about to shoot..."

"And you missed?"

"No, Grishutka: I took pity on it ... and on its mother. I whistled and the little rascal darted back into the thicket as quick as could be."

The old man spent a long time telling his grandson about the three days he'd roamed the forest in search of a fawn, and how, in the end, he'd let it run away. Grishutka listened and then both he and his grandfather burst into laughter.

"I've brought you back a wood-grouse instead, Grishutka," the old man said at the end of his story. "If I hadn't got it, the wolves would have."

The wood-grouse was plucked, after which it was put in the pot. And ailing Grishutka ate the wood-grouse soup with pleasure. Before he fell asleep, he asked his grandad several times:

"So it ran away then?"

"That's right, Grishutka."

"And it was yellow?"

"Yellow all over apart from its muzzle and hooves."

And the little boy fell asleep and all night long he saw in his dreams a yellow fawn trotting happily about the forest with its mother; and the old man, who was lying by the stove, also smiled in his sleep.

Nikolai Teleshov

The Way Home

Translated by *Amanda Calvert*

Nikolai Teleshov was born in 1867, only six years after the emancipation of the serfs in Russia, and died in 1957, forty years after the 1917 October Revolution.

As a young man he worked in education: he published anthologies of stories and verse for children and set up a grammar school outside Moscow. In 1894, on Chekhov's advice, Teleshov went off to Siberia in order to get to know the life of the people better.

At that time the tsarist government was engaged in resettling poor peasants from the European part of Russia in uninhabited Siberia. There were virtually no railways then beyond the Urals and families of peasants set off on their long journey by horse and cart. Along the way they starved, fell ill, died and lost their children. In central Siberia Teleshov came across makeshift hospitals filled with homeless children. "The parents of these children," he wrote on his return, "had either died on the journey or, in an attempt to save the rest of their family from penury and starvation, had sacrificed a child whom they considered to be hopelessly ill. They had neither the strength nor the money to wait for it to die, and they went off without it, believing it to be as good as dead. Of course, the majority of the abandoned children didn't recover. On those rare occasions when a child did survive, it joined the ranks of 'God's children'."

Teleshov's best stories for kids are about these unfortunate, migrant children. The hero of his short story, "Dire Need", is ailing Nikolka, abandoned by his parents. When he gets better, he finds he is "nobody's". Another short story, "Mitrich's New-Year Tree", describes how Mitrich, an old, retired soldier, takes pity on the destitute children and organises a New-Year party for them, which he pays for himself out of his modest pension. The short story "The Way Home" was written in 1896.

I

It was a light, summer's night. A serene moon rode in the sky, bathing the clearings, the roads, the rivers in silvery moonlight, its moonbeams even penetrating into the forest. Semka, a shock-headed, white-faced boy of about eleven, crept stealthily through the doors of the hut for migrant children. Having looked round him, he crossed himself and made a sudden dash for the field from which the road "to Russia" started. Frightened he would be chased, he kept looking back: no one, though, ran after him. And he got safely to the clearing, and then to the highroad. Here he stopped, thought for a bit and walked off slowly down the road.

Semka was one of the homeless children who, abandoned by their migrant parents, become orphans. His mother and father having died of typhus on their way to Siberia, Semka was left alone among strangers, in a strange part of the world, a long way from home. All he remembered of "home" was the white, stone church, the windmills, the Uzyupka stream where he used to bathe with his chums, and the local village which was called Beloye. But the whereabouts of Beloye village and the stream was as much a mystery to him as was the place in which he now found himself. All he knew for sure was that they'd come here along the highroad and that before that they'd crossed a wide river; earlier still, they'd sailed for a long time down a river on a steamer, had travelled by train, by boat, and then again by train. It seemed to him all he had to do was to walk down this road and he'd come to the river and then eventually, after a train-ride, there would be Beloye village and he'd be back home again in familiar surroundings, where he knew every single one of the village lads and all the old men. He also thought about his dead mother and father and how they'd been put in coffins and carried off to a strange cemetery, somewhere on the other side of the wood. Semka remembered how he had cried and asked to be taken home. And how he'd been told he had to live here in the wooden hut for migrant children where he was fed on bread and cabbage soup and was constantly being pushed around: "Get lost! We've no time to listen to you!" Even Alexander Yakovlevich, who was in charge of them all, had shouted at him and ordered him to stay where he was, adding that if he got in the way he'd pull his hair till it hurt. And Semka willy-nilly stayed put and pined for home. With him in the hut were three little girls and one little boy, also abandoned there by their parents who'd disappeared into thin air. But they were too young either

to play with or to tease.

The days and weeks passed and Semka went on living in the loathsome wooden hut, not daring to play truant. Eventually, he decided he'd had enough... After all, the road along which they'd come from Russia was only just over there! Since they wouldn't let him go of their own accord, why not run away? It wouldn't take long to get home and he'd see his beloved stream again, and Beloye village and Malashka, Vasyatka and Mitka, his bosom pals. And he'd go and visit his teacher, Afrosinia Egorovna, and the priest's little boys who had plenty of cherries and apples growing in their garden.

Frightened of being caught, Semka hesitated for a long time. Eventually, however, the thought of being at home again and seeing his chums was so tempting that, choosing a good moment and saying goodbye to the orphanage cabbage soup for ever, he plucked up his courage and ran off to the highroad. He was as happy as a sandpiper to be on his way home. There was nowhere better than Beloye village and not a stream in the whole world to touch the Uzyupka, he was quite sure of that.

The moon sunk towards the horizon, morning broke and Semka went on walking down the highroad, breathing in the fresh, dewy air and overjoyed that every step he took brought him closer to home.

II

The vast land of Siberia has seen and experienced so much that nothing, it seems, will shock it, nothing will surprise it. Prisoners in chains have trudged for thousands of kilometres across it, have toiled down its mines and languished in its jails. Fast troikas, their bells ringing merrily, speed along its roads, while runaway convicts roam over the taiga forests staving off attacks from wild animals, now laying waste to villages, now begging. An almost uninterrupted stream of settlers flows out of Russia, sleeping under their carts, warming themselves at fires by the wayside, and they are met by streams of the destitute, the starving, the sick, going back the other way, many of whom die on the road. And there is nothing new about it: it's all happened many times before.

Siberia has seen too much of other people's grief to be surprised at anything. And so no one was taken aback when Semka would ask as he passed through a village:

"Which is the road to Russia?"

"All roads lead to Russia," he would be told and hands would be waved in the direction of the highroad.

And Semka strode along without feeling tired or afraid; on the contrary, he revelled in his freedom, and the fields full of wild flowers and the noise of bells as the mail-troikas tore past, delighted him. Sometimes he would lie in the grass and fall asleep under a dogrose bush and when it got too hot he'd sit in the shade in a wood by the roadside. The tender-hearted Siberian village women would give him bread and milk to eat and the peasant men he met on the way would sometimes give him a lift in their carts.

"Do me a favour, give me a lift, Grandad!" Semka would beg when a cart and horse went by.

"Be a dear, Auntie, and let me have a bite of bread!" he would ask the women in the villages.

And everyone took pity on him and Semka got plenty to eat.

III

Two weeks passed.

Many a road, many a village had been left behind. Semka, though, was not a bit disheartened and he trudged along without hurrying. From time to time, he would ask:

"Is it still a long way to Russia?"

"To Russia?" the answer would come. "Well, it's not exactly close. You might make it by winter, or perhaps even earlier."

"Is winter soon?"

"No. We haven't had autumn yet."

Whenever Semka walked through a village or, when in the distance, he caught sight of a tall, white belfry with a gold cross on it, tears of happiness would well up in his eyes. Taking off his cap, he'd fall to his knees, exclaiming through his tears:

"Dear Lord, please make winter come soon!"

Sometimes Semka would see a solitary, wooden cross on the verge of the road; there'd be no sign of any human habitation or even a log cabin for miles around: just forest on one side, and the wide-open steppe on the other.

And the cross would remind him of his mother and father and of the tarpaulin tent in the middle of the field under which they had died. And,

forgetting his tiredness, Semka would start to walk along quicker, whispering to himself:

"I'll soon be home, I'll soon be home!"

Eventually he came to a town.

Having gone through the gates, Semka saw to the right and left grey, log cottages with green, red and grey roofs, followed by whitewashed or stone houses. Chickens and grunting pigs wandered about the streets. Next came yards and fences and by the gates of the post office he saw striped milestones. Having passed the post office, he found himself in a sprawling square with a high belfry behind an iron railing and opposite it a depressing-looking watch-tower made of logs. A soldier could be seen pacing up and down at the top of the watch-tower. Further on still the town gates came into sight.

Semka walked straight through the town without stopping and was soon back on the highroad again where he felt freer and happier.

IV

The further he went, the more signs of autumn Semka noticed all round him. "Good. That means winter will soon be here," he thought and it seemed to him his village was getting closer and closer. The fluttering butterflies and dragonflies were no longer to be seen in the fields, the trees were shedding their leaves and the grass was turning yellow. Grey, straggly clouds filled the sky more and more often and the nights became really chilly. "Not far to go now. I'm almost there," Semka thought to himself.

One day as he was walking along the highroad, Semka began to feel hungry: he hadn't had anything to eat since early morning.

Seeing a man sitting cross-legged under some bushes and chewing something, Semka stopped. He watched enviously as, having peeled the shell off a hard-boiled egg, the man bit into it and then took a mouthful of bread.

"What d'you want?" the man asked, continuing to chew.

Semka didn't answer.

The man, who was getting on, had a grey, short beard, a tanned, weather-beaten face and sunken, narrow eyes. He wore a speckled-coloured jacket and felt boots. A cap was stuck on the back of his head.

"What d'you want?" he repeated, looking at Semka.

"Give me a crust of bread, Grandad, for Christ's sake," Semka said timidly.

"I was given this grub myself, chum. Well, here goes, I'll share it with you," and he held out a piece of bread. And then he asked: "Where've you sprung from?"

"I'm going home ... to Russia."

"To Russia? Me too. Why are you on the road, though?"

And Semka began telling the old man in great detail the story of his life. He told him how bored to death he'd been in the wooden hut, how he'd longed to go home and how, one night, he had run away. And listening to him, the stranger nodded his head as if approving what he heard.

"Well done, lad!" he eventually said, patting Semka on the arm. "You've had a tough time of it. Looks like you'll end up the way I have: without ever having a roof over your head, or a place to call your own... A dog's life, if ever there was one!"

"What about you, Grandad?" Semka asked curiously, sitting down opposite the old man.

"Me? I'm a nobody. A stranger..."

Sighing, the old man passed his hand over his face.

"You see how it is, lad, you're still quite a small chap, yet you feel you've got to get home, to where you were born. It's always like that, like one's mother ... it pulls, and pulls... You'll never be able to settle anywhere else. One look round on getting home, and you'll immediately feel better!"

"Grandad, will I make it to Russia by winter?"

"No, you won't, lad. Because the cold will set in and you've no coat, see. I've been around a good bit, I know. You won't make it, I tell you. The frost will get you."

At these words, Semka felt quite dejected. The old man's attention had wandered. Their eyes lowered, they both sat in silence.

Semka began imagining how he'd freeze to death and he was grieved to think that no one in Beloye would know about it. And the old man sat, deep in thoughts of his own, his moustaches twitching.

"Where did you say you were making for?" the Stranger suddenly asked, getting up off the grass.

"Home, Grandad."

"Might as well travel together then."

And, getting back onto the highroad, they both plodded slowly forward.

V

It was getting dark. Semka and the Stranger were soaked to the skin by the rain which had been pouring down ever since midday.

"Keep going, lad," the old man said in an encouraging tone. "Get a move on. Or, before we know where we are the autumn will be upon us, and we won't even have made it to the mountains.* We'll be done for, then."

"Alright, Grandad."

"We're behind hand as it is. Once the frosts start, we'll have had it."

Semka, for all his weariness, was in good spirits. Meeting the old man had cheered him up. He knew now he wouldn't get lost. Grandad would make sure of that; it was pleasant, too, to have someone to chat to. The old man talked to him non-stop about Russia and about Siberia, where they dug for gold. He talked about the jails and about liberty, about the harsh Siberian winter and the green spring grass, the thought of which makes a man pine for home and gives him no rest day or night.

"How we doing, Grandad?" Semka asked.

"Food's hard to come by, see? Means we are getting closer to Russia. And once we get over the mountains, it will be even worse, that's why I keep telling you to get a move on! They like money in Russia, and you and I are a bit short on that. We can be roofless or starve for all they care. Siberia is kind, lad. Only its kindness goes against the grain with us... We can't take it. Come on, son, get a move on!"

A string of carts stood on the side of the road. It was dark and cold and the red flames of the camp-fires beckoned temptingly to the travellers. In the darkness, the unharnessed horses wandered about the clearing nibbling at the limp, autumn grass. The carts stood with their shafts pointing skywards. The carters were cooking their dinner over the fire.

"Peace to you!" said the Stranger, walking up to the fire. "Allow us to warm up a bit, friends."

"Sit down," several voices answered unenthusiastically.

The old man sat down and held out his hands to the flames. Semka came up to the fire too. His wet clothes soon dried out and a pleasant tingling feeling ran down his spine.

"Where do you hail from?" asked one of the men sitting round the fire,

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* Ural Mountains, range of mountains separating European Russia from Siberia.

peering at the Stranger's face.

"From distant parts. We're making for home."

"Your lad?"

"No, picked him up along the way. He's one of the migrant kids. Lost his parents."

All eyes were now on Semka. Huddled by the camp-fire, he was watching the twisted shapes made by the burning twigs, the drifting smoke and the bubbling gruel in the pot.

"So he's an orphan, is he?" the peasants asked, again staring at Semka.

The conversation switched to bread supplies and to work; then, when the grub was done, they began their meal.

"Eat up, eat up," they pressed Semka, "you look chilled through, poor kid."

Having eaten his fill, Semka lay down. It was pleasant to loll by the fireside after the hot meal. The fire crackled merrily, smelling of woodsmoke, just like at home. Had he been at home though, he would have dug up some potatoes and buried them in the ashes. And he remembered the smell of charred potatoes, too hot to hold in one's fist, and how their skin crunched as one bit into them.

The stars overhead were just as clear and there were just as many of them as there used to be at Beloye and he comforted himself with the thought that this must mean his village was fairly close. His legs ached, his spine and the side on which he was lying felt chilly, while his face, chest and knees were beautifully warm from the fire.

The carters were still chatting and the old man with them. Semka could hear his voice: "It's hard going, friends, times are tough..." And the carters were in agreement. Then their voices became muffled, like the humming of bees... Red circles floated before Semka's eyes, and he saw a wide river and beyond it Beloye village. Semka wanted to jump into the water and swim to it, but the Stranger caught him by the leg saying: "It's hard going! It's hard going!" Then the red and green circles came back again and everything got mixed up...

Semka was fast asleep.

VI

It was early morning when he woke up. Clouds scudded across the sky. The camp-fire had gone out, and gusts of cold, whistling wind caught up

the cinders and blew them across the field. There was no sign of the carters. The Stranger was lying rolled up on the ground.

Semka sat up.

"Grandad!" he called out. There was no answer. "Where have the men gone?" was the next thought that came into his mind, and he began to worry that something had happened to the Stranger.

The wind whistled, scattering the ash; the twigs rustled on the charred brands, and the whole field seemed to be stirring and groaning. It was becoming really scarey.

"Grandad!" Semka shouted again, but the wind carried his voice in the other direction.

Despite his efforts to keep them open, Semka's eyes kept shutting and he was finding it difficult to keep his head up. He lay down again, there was a loud buzzing sound in his ears. And he dreamt that the Stranger had been killed by robbers, that he, Semka, was somewhere close to Beloye, but that someone was stopping him entering the village and he was being pulled back to a huge field in the middle of which stood the hut for migrant children. "So you tried to go home, did you?!" said an angry voice. Then they brought some hot cabbage soup and poured it straight into Semka's mouth and over his head; more and more soup was poured over him until a big, boiling mountain rose from his head, and they went on and on pouring the soup. Semka's head felt as if it was bursting. Gasping for breath, he opened his eyes. The Stranger was sitting beside him, shaking his head gloomily.

"Well, lad?" he said, stroking Semka's face with his hand and, looking up, Semka saw the sky, the sun, and then the Stranger's grey beard and sunken eyes. "Well? We're in a bad way, aren't we?"

"Grandad..." Semka found it difficult to speak.

"Come on, lad, sit up."

The old man lifted Semka onto his lap, letting the latter's head fall back on his chest.

"Well, lad?"

"I'm alright..." Semka muttered.

"Make an effort, son, we've got to get going again somehow... Can't die here."

In an hour's time they were moving slowly along the road, holding on to each other for support. The Stranger walked at an even pace while Semka often stumbled.

"The town's too far off by half," the old man muttered. "You could do with a spell in hospital. Do you good. Won't do me any good, though. If I so much as show my face in the town, I've had it."

A little while afterwards, Semka stopped.

"My legs won't go any further, Grandad... Let's sit for a bit."

"We'll go into that copse. It'll be warmer there. That's it, hold on to me, there we go!"

Once in the wood, they both sat down. The Stranger told Semka to lay his head in his lap. Then he made Semka a bed out of twigs.

"There you are, son!"

"Grandad!" Semka said in a beseeching voice. "You won't leave me behind, will you?"

Bursting into tears, he didn't say another word. The buzzing and whistling noise started again, someone was pulling him by the head, everything round him went lurry and he felt as if he was on fire...

"Want to go home, want to go home!" Semka moaned and, after some effort, managed to prise open his eyes. He couldn't make out a thing though...

Sometimes he thought he saw new faces and that he was in a hut, but he didn't recognise it; then he saw his mother, the Uzyupka stream, then some more unknown faces, then the Stranger; and night and day became muddled. Eventually Semka opened his eyes.

He was lying in a room on a soft bed. There was a ceiling above him, he could see it quite clearly and he could also see the bare branches of a tree swaying outside.

"I'm back in the hut again," he thought, panicking. And he wanted to jump up and make a dash for it, but his body wouldn't move and his head seemed to be stuck to the pillow.

"Where's Grandad?" Semka wondered, looking round him for the familiar face. But the old man, and the forest and the highroad were gone. And Semka felt deeply hurt for he realised the Stranger must have abandoned him and tears poured down his white, emaciated face.

VII

One day, wearing hospital pyjamas and still fairly weak after his illness, Semka stood by the window staring at the empty street, where the wind was chasing dead leaves over the puddles. Demidych, the watchman,

stood behind Semka. He was also looking out of the window, and lost in thought. Semka had already learnt from him how he'd been brought unconscious to the hospital by an old man. The head of police, who happened to be there at the time, took one look at the old man and said: "Cheers, handsome! So you're on the run again?" Whereupon the old man had been arrested. It was the third time he had escaped from penal servitude and the third time he'd been caught.

Semka had heard all this from the watchman and not a morning or night passed without him sighing and thinking: "Dear Lord, please save the Stranger!"

"They're sending the convicts off today," the watchman said. "Keep a look out and you'll see them come past."

Semka soon began to hear some strange, clanking sounds. Then soldiers appeared with guns slung over their shoulders and they were followed by a column of people in grey coats and round hats, the chains on their hands and feet jangling. Soldiers walked on both sides of the column as well as behind it. Everyone looked pinched with cold.

With sinking heart, Semka stood glued to the window-pane, staring hard at the faces in the grey column. Suddenly he let out an anguished cry and began drumming on the window with his fists.

"Grandad! Grandad! Grandad!"

He'd spied the Stranger among the convicts. Bowed down by chains, he was walking past, virtually right under the window.

"Grandad! Grandad!" Semka shouted, out of his mind with happiness and horror.

He made such a noise that many of the convicts turned round. The Stranger did too. Looking at Semka with his sunken, grey eyes, he sighed, nodding his head sadly at the boy.

Tears poured down Semka's cheeks and his heart was pounding violently. The column of convicts and their escort had already gone past and disappeared round the corner of the building. Yet Semka went on beating at the window and shouting: "Grandad!" Eventually the watchman said to him in a matter-of-fact tone:

"What you howling for? They're sending you home soon, because you're a kid and this is no place for a kid. That's orders, so stop bawling!"

But Semka went on sobbing his heart out straining his neck to see the corner, round which his loyal friend had disappeared in his chains.

Leonid Andreyev

PETYA GOES TO THE COUNTRY

Translated by *Amanda Calvert*

Though Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919), a Russian writer of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, never wrote specifically for children, even today no list of recommended reading for kids is complete without his short stories, "Geraska and the Bergamot Pear" (1898) and "Petya Goes to the Country" (1899).

As a child, Andreyev's favourite writers were Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, Gustave Aimard and Edgar Allan Poe. Though "Petya Goes to the Country" is a far cry, of course, from detective stories or tales of adventure about Red Indians, the work owes its popularity nonetheless to its author's novel approach to a very ordinary theme: a town boy's holiday in the country develops into an exotic journey into the unknown. The story ends on a sad note: Petya is sent back to the town to his previous wretched life as a hairdresser's drudge.

Osip Abramovich, the barber, adjusted a grimy sheet over his customer's chest; shoving it into the back of the latter's collar, he shouted in a curt, sharp voice:

"Boy, water!"

Examining his face in the mirror and noticing yet another blackhead had appeared on his chin, the customer, not best pleased, averted his gaze, whereupon his eyes immediately came to rest on a skinny arm reaching out from somewhere to one side of him with a tin of hot water, which it put down on the shelf under the mirror. Raising his eyes a bit higher, he saw the barber's strange and somewhat cock-eyed reflection and he noted the swift, threatening look the latter cast downwards at someone's head; he also saw that his lips were moving in a silent, yet forceful whisper. When the customer was shaved not by the owner of the shop, Osip Abramovich, but by one of the juniors, Prokopy or Mikhail, the whisper became audible and took the form of an indefinite threat:

"Just you wait!"

This meant the boy hadn't produced the water quick enough and that punishment lay in store for him.

"And quite right, too," the customer would think, his head on one side and contemplating a large, sweaty hand right by his nose, three fingers of which stuck up in the air, while the remaining two, clammy and odorous, gently supported his cheek and chin, as the blunt razor, with an unpleasant rasping sound, removed the soapy foam and stiff stubble of beard.

Petya, the boy who was forever being shouted at, was the youngest of the employees in the shop. The other lad, Nikolka, all of three years his senior, was soon to be promoted to junior assistant. Even now, when a customer of little consequence looked into the shop and the juniors, in the absence of their master, were feeling lazy, they'd put Nikolka on the job and would laugh when he had to stand on tiptoe in order to reach the back of a hairy head belonging to a sturdy porter. Sometimes the customer, angry at the mess that had been made of his hair would raise a hullabaloo, and the juniors would then turn on Nikolka, shouting at him. But such occasions were rare, and Nikolka gave himself airs and behaved as if he was one of the seniors: he smoked, spat, used vile language and even boasted to Petya that he drank vodka though he was probably lying. Having run off with the junior members of the staff to a nearby street to watch a fight, he'd return beaming with happiness and laughing, to be greeted by Osip

Abramovich who would clip him twice over the ear: once on either side.

Petya was ten; he didn't smoke or drink vodka or swear though he knew a lot of bad words and was envious on all these counts of his friend.

When there were no customers about, Petya and Nikolka would chat. The latter, always kinder when the two of them were on their own, would explain to the "boy" what was meant by a trim to the back and side, a French crop or a cut with a parting.

Sometimes they would sit in the window next to the pink-cheeked wax bust of a woman and watch the goings-on in the street, where life began from the early hours. Grey with dust, the trees along the boulevard stood limp and motionless in the scorching sunlight, and the shade they gave out was grey too and not in the least bit cooling. Men and women sat on all the benches; they were dressed in dirty, strange garments, without scarves or caps, and it seemed they lived right there on the boulevard and had no other home. Often a dishevelled head would drop wearily onto a shoulder and a body would try and make room for itself to go to sleep, as a third-class passenger does who has travelled for thousands of kilometres without rest. There was nowhere whatsoever though to lie down. A keeper in a bright blue uniform, carrying a stick, paced along the paths, making sure that there was no lounging on the benches or that no one threw themselves down on the grass which was burnt to a frazzle by the sun, but looked temptingly soft and cool.

Nikolka knew the names of many of the people on the benches and told Petya all sorts of stories about them, and as he did so he laughed revealing a row of pointed teeth. And Petya marvelled how clever and brave Nikolka was and thought that one day he would be like him too. But for the time being all he wanted was to be somewhere else, a long way away from the barber's shop... He wanted this very badly.

The days went by for Petya extremely monotonously; there was no telling them apart as there is no telling twin brothers apart. Winter and summer, he saw the same mirrors: the mirror with the crack and the crooked, funny mirror. The same picture hung on the dirty, stained wall. And morning and evening and all day long Petya was hounded by the abrupt cry of "Boy, water!" and he was forever fetching and carrying it. There were no days off. On Sundays, when there was no light in the shop windows and stalls to illuminate the street, a bright shaft of light from the barber's shop shone onto the pavement until late into the night and the

passer-by would often see a small, skinny figure, huddled in a corner on a chair, deep in thought perhaps, or slumber. Though Petya slept a lot, he was always sleepy for some reason, and it often seemed to him that what he saw going on round him wasn't real, but a long, unpleasant dream. He often spilt the water or didn't hear the sharp cry of "Boy, water!" and he became thinner and thinner and nasty scabs appeared on his cropped head. The customers looked squeamishly at the skinny little boy covered in freckles, with his always sleepy eyes, half-open mouth and filthy hands and neck. The skin round his eyes and nose was covered in fine lines, as if traced by a sharp needle, and this made him look like an aged dwarf.

Petya didn't know whether he was bored or happy, but he wanted desperately to be somewhere else, although where this somewhere else was or what it was like he couldn't say. When his mother Nadezhda, who was a cook, came to see him, he ate the goodies she'd brought, and didn't complain, but just begged that she take him away. After which he'd forget his plea and listlessly bid his mother goodbye without asking when she'd be coming again. And Nadezhda would reflect ruefully that she only had one son and that he was a half-wit.

How long Petya went on living like this he couldn't say. But one day his mother arrived at dinner-time and, after speaking to Osip Abramovich, told Petya that he'd been given permission to visit the country house at Tsaritsyno* where the family for which she worked lived. Petya didn't understand at first, then his face crumpled into silent laughter and he began to urge Nadezhda to go at once. The latter felt that decorum required she chat to Osip Abramovich and ask after the health of his wife but Petya pulled her by degrees towards the door, tugging at her hand. He'd no idea what a country house was, but he believed that it must be the place to which he'd been longing to go for so long. And he selfishly forgot all about Nikolka who, hands stuffed in pockets, was standing nearby, staring at Nadezhda and trying to assume his usual defiant expression. But instead of defiance there was a look of deep anguish in his eyes: he didn't have a mother and right now he wouldn't have said no even to a mother like fat Nadezhda. The thing was that he had never been to the country either.

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* Tsaritsyno, a district on the outskirts of Moscow. Here in 1775 Catherine the Great bought an estate and had a palace built, the ruins of which still exist today.— *Ed.*

The station with its hubbub of voices, rumbling trains, engine whistles, now harsh and angry like Osip Abramovich's voice, now shrill and thin like the voice of his sick wife, and the hurrying endless stream of passengers dumbfounded Petya who'd never seen anything like it and filled him with excitement. Like his mother, he was nervous they'd be late, although there was a good half-hour to spare before the train was due to leave. When they took their seats in the compartment and the train set off, Petya sat glued to the window, his cropped head swivelling on his thin neck as if on a metal pivot.

He'd been born and brought up in the city, and this was the first time in his life he'd set eyes on a field — and everything about it took him by surprise: the fact that one could see so far away, that the trees in the distant forest looked like blades of grass and that the sky in this new world was extraordinarily big and full of light, as if one was gazing at it from a rooftop. Petya could see it from his window and when he turned round to face his mother, the same blue sky appeared in the window opposite: white, fluffy clouds were sailing across it. Petya either fidgeted about in his own window or ran across to the window on the other side of the compartment, clinging trustingly with a grubby hand onto the shoulders and knees of the other passengers, who smiled at him. One gentleman though, who was reading a newspaper and yawning all the time either from extreme fatigue or boredom, glared at Petya once or twice, so Nadezhda hurriedly explained:

"It's his first time on a train, sir, he's over-excited..."

"Hm!" the gentleman grunted and buried himself in his paper.

Nadezhda wanted to tell him how Petya had been working for Osip Abramovich, the barber, for three years and that the latter had promised to put him on his feet, which would be a very good thing — for what could a poor woman on her own do, and he was her only support in illness or old age. But the gentleman had an irate look on his face, so Nadezhda kept all these thoughts to herself.

To the right of the railway track was a hummocky plain, dark green from constant dampness, the grey cottages scattered along the edge of it looking like dolls' houses, while standing on a high, green hill at the bottom of which was a glistening, silvery strip of water, there was an equally toy-like white church.

When the train, making an even noisier clickety-clack sound, sped over

the bridge and seemed to be suspended in the air over the glass-like surface of the water. Petya jumped with fright and shrank back from the window. He immediately returned to it though, loth to miss any detail of the journey. Petya's eyes no longer looked sleepy and the crow's-feet on his skin had disappeared. It was as if someone had run a hot iron over his face, smoothing out the wrinkles and making it white and shining.

For the first two days of his stay in the country Petya was frightened of the forest, which rustled quietly over his head and was dark and very scarey. He loved the sunlit, green glades, full of brightly-coloured flowers, which appeared to be singing, and he wanted to hug them as if they were his sisters, while the dark blue sky beckoned to him and laughed like his mother. Pale with excitement and smiling for some unknown reason, Petya walked solemnly along the verge of the forest and wooded bank of the pond. When he was tired, he'd throw himself down in the thick, damp grass and disappear in it; only a small, freckled nose could be seen protruding above it. To begin with, he'd often run back to his mother and hang round her and when the master of the house asked him if he liked it in the country, he'd smile shyly and say:

"Very much!"

And then he'd make his way again to the menacing forest and to the still water in the pond, and he seemed to be questioning them about something.

But two more days went by and Petya's relations with nature improved beyond all recognition. This came about thanks to Mitya, a grammar-school boy from the village of Old Tsaritsyno. Mitya had a tanned face and his hair, which stood up on end, had been bleached white by the sun. He was fishing in the pond when Petya first saw him. Mitya promptly struck up a conversation with Petya and they were soon firm friends. Mitya gave Petya one of his fishing-rods to hold and then took him a long way off to bathe. Petya was afraid at first to enter the water, but once he was in he was loth to climb out. He pretended he was swimming: sticking his nose and eyebrows up into the air, choking and splashing, he was like a puppy in the water for the first time. When Petya got dressed he was blue with cold like a corpse, and his teeth chattered as he talked. On the suggestion of Mitya, who was never at a loss for what to do, they explored the ruins of the palace, clambering up onto the roof which was overgrown with trees and bushes and wandering among the remains of the tumble-

down walls. It was a really good place: there were piles of stones everywhere, which one could scramble up to the top of, and between them young rowan-trees and birch-trees had sprouted up. It was dead quiet and it seemed that any moment someone would jump out from behind a corner or that a really terrifying face would appear in one of the cracked window embrasures. Gradually Petya came to feel quite at home in the country and he forgot all about Osip Abramovich and the barber's shop.

"See the weight he's put on," Nadezhda said, overjoyed. She was round and fat herself and glowed like a brass samovar from the heat in her kitchen. She put Petya's plumpness down to the fact that he was getting plenty to eat. But in fact Petya ate very little, not because he didn't want to, but because he was too busy to eat: it wouldn't be so bad if one could swallow the food down whole without chewing it, but the trouble was one had to chew it and then wait for ages kicking one's legs while Nadezhda, who ate very slowly, picked the bones clean, wiped her face with her apron and chatted about trifles. And he, Petya, had a hundred and one things to do: he had to bathe five times, cut himself a fishing-rod in the hazel-nut grove, and dig for worms. And all this required time. Petya ran about barefoot now, which was much, much nicer than wearing boots with thick soles: occasionally, the rough ground underfoot felt hot, occasionally, it felt cool. Petya had also discarded his secondhand grammar schoolboy's jacket which made him look like a prosperous barber's assistant. He only put it on in the evenings when he went to watch the boating parties from the big house at the dam; elegantly dressed and in good spirits, the house guests would laugh as they stepped into the rocking dinghies which would glide slowly through the water, the reflection of the trees wobbling as if they'd been touched by a breeze.

Towards the end of the week the master of the house brought a letter back from the town, addressed to "Nadezhda, the Cook". And when he read it to her, Nadezhda began to cry and the soot which was on her apron became smeared all over her face. From the incoherent words she uttered as this was going on, it was evident that the letter concerned Petya. It was evening. Petya was in the backyard playing hopscotch by himself. He puffed out his cheeks because it made it much easier to hop. This simple but absorbing occupation had been taught to him by Mitya and now Petya, as keen as could be, was practising on his own. The master of the house went outside and, placing a hand on Petya's shoulder, he said:

"Well, old chap, it's time for you to go!"

Smiling shyly, Petya didn't utter a word.

"As dumb as they come," the master thought to himself, and he repeated:

"You've got to go, old chap."

Petya smiled blankly. Then Nadezhda appeared and said, sobbing:

"You've got to go, son!"

"Where to?" Petya asked in surprise.

He'd forgotten all about the town and as for the other place he'd so desperately wanted to go to, he'd found it at long last.

"To your master, Osip Abramovich."

Petya continued not to understand, although it was all as clear as daylight now. His mouth went dry and when he eventually spoke he had difficulty moving his tongue:

"But I'm going fishing tomorrow. I've got a rod, look..."

"It can't be helped, son. He says Prokopy has fallen ill and been taken to hospital. They're shorthanded, he says. Don't cry, he'll let you off again: Osip Abramovich is a kind man."

But Petya wasn't crying and he still didn't understand. Eventually though the penny dropped. And then Petya surprised his mother and touched the master and mistress of the house: he didn't just cry as emaciated town kids are wont to do, he screamed at the top of his voice, louder than the most vociferous peasant and rolled about on the ground. His skinny fingers clenched together, he lashed out at his mother's hands, the ground and at whatever got in the way. He could feel the pain from the sharp pebbles and grains of sand, but it was as if he was trying to hurt himself.

Eventually Petya calmed down, and then the master said to the mistress of the house, who was standing in front of a mirror, arranging a white rose in her hair:

"You see, he's stopped, a child's tears don't last long."

"I'm very sorry for the poor kid, all the same."

"Yes, they live in awful conditions, but there are people who are even worse off. You ready?"

And they went to the Dipman Gardens, where there was to be dancing that evening; the military band was already playing.

The next day, Petya was on his way back to Moscow by the seven

o'clock train. Again green fields, white with dew, flashed past him, only this time they were going by in the opposite direction. The secondhand grammar schoolboy's jacket was wrapped round his thin body, the top of a white cotton neckband sticking up through the collar. Petya didn't fidget and hardly looked out of the window at all; he sat quietly and modestly, his hands folded on his lap. He looked sleepy and apathetic, and the skin round his eyes and nose was covered in crow's-feet, like an old man's skin is. Eventually the pillars and wooden planking of the platform came into view and the train drew to a halt.

Pushing their way through the hurrying stream of passengers they emerged onto a noisy street and the big, greedy town listlessly swallowed up its small victim.

"Mind you hide my rod!" Petya said to his mother as they arrived at the barber's shop.

"I will, son! Don't you worry! Perhaps you'll be able to come and visit us again."

And once more the abrupt shout "Boy, water!" rang out in the dirty, stuffy barber's shop, and the customer saw a skinny, grubby arm stretching out towards the shelf under the mirror and heard the whispered threat: "Just you wait!" This meant that the boy who was half-asleep had spilt the water or hadn't carried out his orders properly. And at nights in that part of the shop where Nikolka and Petya slept side by side, a low voice could be heard talking excitedly about the country, and about what nobody had ever seen or even thought of. In the silence that followed, the quick, short breathing of children became audible and then another voice, in an unusually coarse, energetic tone for a child, would exclaim:

"The devil take them! I hope they rot!"

"Why?"

"Because... The whole lot of them!"

A string of carts went by and the rumbling drowned the boys' voices.

Alexander Kuprin

THE WHITE POODLE

Translated by *Kathleen Cook-Horujy*

"The White Poodle" is a delightful story for children written by Alexander Kuprin, one of the most talented Russian prose writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Kuprin was born in 1870, the son of a minor provincial official. He earned his living at all sorts of jobs, being at one time or another a professional army officer, a boxer, an estate manager, an artist and a factory clerk. He was interested in the circus and airships, and even studied to be a dentist. His stories reflect his rich and varied knowledge of Russian life.

Many of Kuprin's stories about nature, birds and animals, and various episodes from theatre and circus life have become firm favourites with children, such as "Starlings", "Zembo the Elephant", "At the Menagerie", and others. "The White Poodle" was written in 1904. It is based on a real event which Kuprin witnessed in the Crimea.

After the October Revolution of 1917 the writer emigrated, returning to his homeland in 1937. "I want to write for young people and those delightful Soviet children," he said in a statement made to the press. Unfortunately this desire was not to be fulfilled, for Kuprin died the following year.

I

Down narrow mountain paths, from one cluster of villas to another, the tiny roving troupe made their way along the southern shore of the Crimea. Out in front, his long pink tongue lolling to one side, trotted Arto, the white poodle, his coat trimmed in a lion cut. At crossroads he would stop and look round enquiringly, wagging his tail. From signs known to him alone he always managed to choose the right path and then set off again at the gallop, his woolly ears flopping gaily. Behind the dog walked Sergei, a boy of twelve, carrying a rolled-up mat for acrobatic exercises under his left arm and under his right a small, dirty cage with a goldfinch trained to pull coloured strips of paper telling your fortune out of a box. Trudging along at the rear came the eldest member of the troupe, Granddad Martyn Lodyzhkin, with a barrel-organ on his hunched back.

The barrel-organ, an ancient one, suffered from a hoarse cough and had received countless repairs in its time. It could play two tunes: a melancholy German waltz by Lauper and a galop from *A Chinese Journey*, both of which had been fashionable about thirty or forty years ago, but were now entirely forgotten. What is more, the barrel-organ had two faulty pipes. The descant pipe had lost its voice; it could not play at all, with the result that when its turn came, the music began to stutter, as it were, to limp and stumble. In the other pipe, which emitted a low note, the valve did not close straightaway: whenever it played, it held the same bass note for a long time, drowning and distorting all the others, until it suddenly decided to stop. The old man was aware of these defects in his machine and occasionally remarked jokingly, but with a touch of concealed sadness:

"What can you expect? It's an old organ ... with a bit of a cough. Holiday folk complain when you start playing. 'Ugh, what an awful din!' they say. The songs used to be nice and fashionable, but ladies and gents don't think much of them nowadays. What they want now is the *Geisha Girl*, or *Under the Two-Headed Eagle*, or that waltz from *The Bird-Seller*. And those pipes... I wanted to get the barrel-organ mended, but the man wouldn't take it. 'Get some new pipes,' he said. 'Or better still sell the old hurdy-gurdy to a museum ... as a historical relic...' Well, I'll be blowed! It's fed the two of us up to now, Sergei, lad, and God grant it will for a bit longer."

Old man Lodyzhkin felt for his barrel-organ the affection one feels for a live, close, perhaps even kindred being. After spending many years of his hard vagrant life with it, he had eventually come to regard it as something animate, almost conscious. Sometimes at night, when they were sleeping in some filthy inn, the barrel-organ standing on the floor by the old man's head suddenly uttered a faint sound, sad, solitary and quavering like an old man's sigh. Then Lodyzhkin would stroke its carved side quietly and whisper affectionately:

"What is it, old fellow? Fed up? Never mind..."

Just as much as the barrel-organ, possibly even a little more, he loved his young companions in eternal wandering: Arto the poodle and little Sergei. He had "hired" the boy five years ago from a profligate widowed shoemaker, undertaking to pay two roubles a month for him. But the shoemaker had died shortly afterwards, and Sergei had remained bound forever to the old man by both affection and the petty interests of everyday life.

II

The path ran along a high slope down to the shore, twisting and turning in the shade of ancient olive-trees. Through the trees came occasional glimpses of the sea, which seemed to rise upwards like a mighty, tranquil wall as it receded into the distance, its colour even a deeper blue when seen through the leaf-framed gaps, amid the silvery foliage. There were cicadas everywhere — in the grass, the bushes of cornel and dog-rose, the vineyards and the trees; the air quivered with their monotonous, ringing, incessant chirring. The day was hot and sultry without the slightest breeze, and the hot ground burnt the soles of their feet.

Sergei, who was walking ahead of the organ-grinder as usual, stopped and waited for the old man to catch him up.

"What's the matter, Sergei?" he asked.

"It's the heat, Grandad Lodyzhkin ... it gets you down. If only we could have a dip..."

Without halting the old man adjusted the barrel-organ on his back with a customary gesture and wiped his perspiring face with his sleeve.

"I'll say, lad!" he sighed, gazing longingly down at the cool blue of the sea. "Only after a dip you'd feel even worse. A doctor I knew once told me

that there salt's no good for you ... makes you awful weak, it does... That sea salt..."

"Perhaps he was lying?" Sergei said doubtfully.

"Lying! What'd he do that for? He's a respectable man, he is, don't drink ... got a house of his own in Sevastopol. Besides there's no path down to the sea here. Wait till we get to Miskhor, then we'll wash our sinful bodies alright. It's a real treat to have a dip before dinner ... then a nice bit of shut-eye ... just the job..."

Hearing the conversation behind him, Arto turned and ran up to the people. His friendly blue eyes, half-closed with the heat, looked out beseechingly, while the long tongue trembled from his rapid breathing.

"What is it, boy? Too hot for you?" asked the old man.

The dog gave a convulsive yawn, rolled his tongue, shook his whole body and let out a faint yelp.

"Well, old boy, there's nowt we can do about it... The Bible says 'in the sweat of thy brow'," Lodyzhkin continued solemnly. "Even if it's a muzzle in your case, and not a brow, that don't make no difference... Come on, off you go in front, don't get in our way... But to tell the truth, Sergei, I like it when it's really hot. Only the barrel-organ's a nuisance. If it weren't for having to work, I'd just lie me down on the grass somewhere, in the shade, belly up, and take a nice little nap. That there sun's the best medicine for our old bones."

The path went down to join the broad highway, hard as stone and dazzlingly white. Here began an old park, which belonged to a count, and had beautiful summer-houses, flower-beds, conservatories and fountains dotted about amid the dense greenery. Lodyzhkin knew these places well; each year he traversed them one by one during the grape season, when the Crimea is full of well-dressed, affluent and pleasure-loving visitors. The lush southern landscape did not move the old man, but there was much that delighted Sergei who was here for the first time. The magnolias with their hard leaves, shining as if they were lacquered, and white flowers as big as plates; the arbours covered with vines and heavy bunches of grapes; the huge plane-trees with their light bark and mighty crowns; the tobacco plantations, the streams and waterfalls, and everywhere – in flowerbeds, on fences and villa walls – radiant, magnificent, sweet-smelling roses, — all this never ceased to astound the boy's naive soul with its vibrant, blossoming charm. He expressed his delight aloud, tugging at the old man's sleeve all the time.

"Hey, Grandad! Grandad Lodyzhkin! There are gold fish in that fountain over there! They're really gold, Grandad, honest they are!" the boy shouted, pressing his face to the iron railings round a garden with a large pool in the middle. "And peaches, Grandad! Piles of them! All on one tree!"

"Come on, lad, don't go gawpin' like that!" the old man called him away jokingly. "Just wait till we get to Novorossiisk, then go south again. The places there are really a sight for sore eyes. Up here you'll see Sochi, Adler and Tuapse, and then, my lad, it's Sukhum and Batum. Your eyes'll pop out of your head! Take those there palm-trees, for instance. The trunk's all shaggy, like felt, and each leaf's big enough to hide the two of us."

"Honest?" Sergei exclaimed excitedly.

"You'll see for yourself. There's all sorts of things there. Oranges, for example, or lemons. You've seen them in shops, haven't you?"

"So what?"

"Well, they just grow in the air. On trees, just like apples or pears in our parts... And the folk there are a strange lot too, lad: Turks, Pershuns, Circassians and the rest of them, all wearin' dressing-gowns and carryin' daggers... They're pretty wild folk and no mistake. And there's Moors too, lad. I've seen them in Batum many a time."

"Moors? I know, they're the ones with horns," Sergei said confidently.

"No, they don't have no horns, that's a load of nonsense. But they're black as soot, and all shiny. They've got big, thick, red lips, and big white eyes, and their hair's as curly as a black sheep's."

"Are they frightening ... those Moors?"

"Well, how to say? If you've not seen them before ... you do feel a bit scared, but then you see that other folk aren't afraid, and get a bit braver yourself... There's all sorts of things down there, lad. You'll see for yourself. The only trouble there is the fever. Because there's lots of marshes and everything rots in the heat. The local folk don't catch it, it leaves them alone, but folk from other parts get it real bad. Still that's enough prattling, lad. Get you through the gate. There's some fine gentlefolk in this house... You just ask me: I know it all."

But that day was not a lucky one for them. At some places they were chased away as soon as they appeared on the horizon, at others with the very first hoarse and raucous notes of the barrel-organ irritated and impatient

owners waved at them from balconies to make themselves scarce or a servant announced that "The master and mistress are not at home." At two houses they were paid for their performance, it is true, but a pittance. Grandad never disdained any payment, however small. Coming through the gate into the road, he would jingle the copper coins in his pocket with a satisfied air and say benevolently:

"Two and five, that makes seven copecks... Never mind, Sergei, my lad, every little counts. Seven times seven and you've got half a rouble. That's enough to get food for the three of us, a place to spend the night, and a drop of something for old Lodyzhkin's aches and pains... Eh, those gentlefolk don't understand that! They think twenty copecks is too much, but they're ashamed of giving five ... so they tell you to go away. But it would be better if they only gave three... I'm not offended. I don't mind... Why should I?"

In general Lodyzhkin was of a humble disposition and never grumbled, even when he was chased away. But today his usual serene benevolence was ruffled by a beautiful, plump and seemingly very kind lady, the owner of a splendid villa with a garden full of flowers. She listened attentively to the music, watched Sergei's acrobatic exercises and Arto's amusing "tricks" even more attentively, and after this questioned the lad for some time in great detail about how old he was, what his name was, where he had learnt gymnastics, whether the old man was a relative of his, who his parents were, and so on; then she asked them to wait and went inside.

It was ten minutes, or even quarter of an hour, before she reappeared, and the longer time dragged on, the more the performers' vague, but tempting hopes grew. Grandad even whispered to the boy, his hand cautiously over his mouth like a shield:

"We've struck lucky here alright, Sergei, lad. You just listen to me. I know it all, lad. Maybe she'll give us one of her old dresses or a pair of shoes. That's for sure!"

Finally the lady came onto the balcony, threw a small silver coin into Sergei's outstretched cap and disappeared straightaway. The coin turned out to be an old ten-copeck piece, rubbed on both sides, with a hole in it. Grandad examined it for a long time in amazement. He went into the road and walked a long way from the villa, still holding the coin in his palm as if he were weighing it.

"Eh, she's fooled us!" he said, stopping suddenly in his tracks. "Well, I never... And we three ninnies tried so hard. It would've been better if she'd given us a button. At least we could have used it. But what am I going to do with this rubbish? I bet she's thinking the old man'll pass it on one night. But you're wrong, mam. Old man Lodyzhkin doesn't play dirty tricks like that. No, mam! You can keep your precious ten copecks. There!"

And with angry pride he threw down the coin, which disappeared under the white dust on the road with a faint jingle.

In this way the old man, the boy and the dog went round the whole settlement and were about to walk down to the sea. On the left one more villa remained, the last. It was not visible behind the high white wall above which, on the other side, rose a dense line of slender dusty cypress-trees, like long greyish-black spindles. Only through the broad gates of wrought-iron with their intricate lacy carving could you see a corner of a fresh lawn, like a patch of bright green silk, circular flowerbeds and further off, in the distance, a pathway covered with dense vines on trellises. In the middle of the lawn a gardener was watering roses with a long hose. He put a finger over the nozzle, and a fountain of spray sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow in the sun.

Grandad was about to walk past, but then he looked through the gates and stopped in confusion.

"Wait a minute, Sergei," he called to the boy. "I do believe there's some folk movin' about in there. Well, I never! The times I've passed by and never seen a soul. Let's hear what it says, Sergei, lad!"

"'Friendship Villa. Strictly No Admittance,'" Sergei read the words carved on one of the gate-posts.

"'Friendship'?" the illiterate man repeated. "There you are! That's a real word for you — friendship. We've been down on our luck all day, but we'll make up for it here. I've got a nose like a bloodhound, I have. Come on, Arto, you son of a dog! Quick march, Sergei. Always ask me: I know it all."

III

The garden paths were covered with gravel that crunched under your feet and lined with large pink shells along the edges. In the beds, over a gay carpet of different-coloured grasses, were gorgeous resplendent

flowers which filled the air with their fragrance. Clear water gurgled and splashed in the ponds, garlands of creeping plants trailed down from beautiful vases hanging between the trees, and in front of the house, on marble columns, were two shining glass balls in which the wandering troupe saw themselves reflected upside down, looking long, crooked and very funny.

In front of the balcony was a large open space. Sergei spread his carpet on it, while Grandad set up his barrel-organ and was just about to start turning the handle, when their attention was suddenly distracted by a strange and unexpected spectacle.

Uttering piercing cries, a boy of eight or ten shot out like a bomb from the inside rooms onto the terrace. He was wearing a light sailor-boy suit and had bare arms and knees. His fair hair lay untidily on his shoulders in large ringlets. Six other people came running out after the boy: two women in aprons; a fat elderly footman in a frock-coat, with no beard or moustache, but with long grey side-whiskers; a skinny ginger-haired, red-nosed girl in a blue check dress; a young frail-looking, but very beautiful lady in a pale-blue lace négligé and, finally, a fat bald gentleman in a tussore suit and gold spectacles. They were all extremely agitated, waving their arms, talking loudly and even pushing one another. It was immediately clear that the cause of their agitation was the boy in the sailor suit who had suddenly rushed onto the terrace.

Meanwhile the person responsible for this commotion collapsed face down on the stone floor, without ceasing to howl for a second, rolled over quickly onto his back and began to flay out hard with his arms and legs in all directions. The grown-ups fussed around him. The old footman in the frock-coat pressed both hands to his starched shirt with a beseeching air, shook his long side-whiskers and cried wretchedly:

"My dear master! Nikolai Apollonovich! Pray do not upset your mamma, sir. Please get up! Be so kind as to take this medicine. The mixture is very sweet, nothing but syrup, sir. Please get up..."

The women in aprons kept throwing up their hands and twittering rapidly in frightened, servile voices. With tragic gestures the red-nosed girl was shouting something very impressive, but totally incomprehensible, evidently in a foreign language. The gentleman in gold spectacles was reasoning with the boy in a deep impressive bass; in so doing he kept turning his head first to one side, then to the other, and spreading out his arms

sedately. While the beautiful lady groaned languidly, pressing a fine lace handkerchief to her eyes:

"Oh, Trilly, oh, dear God! I beg you, my angel. Listen, Mamma begs you! Do take your medicine, there's a good boy! You'll feel better straightaway, you'll see. Your tummy will stop aching and your head. Do it for me, my darling! Would you like Mamma to go down on her knees, Trilly? There, look, I'm kneeling before you. Would you like me to give you a gold coin? Two gold coins? Five gold coins, Trilly? Would you like a real donkey? A real little horse? Oh, do say something to him, Doctor!"

"Now listen, Trilly, be a man," the fat gentleman in the spectacles boomed.

"Ow, ow, ow! Oo, oo, oo!" howled the boy, writhing around the balcony and kicking out wildly.

In spite of his extreme agitation, he nevertheless managed to aim his kicks at the stomachs and legs of the people fussing around him, who also succeeded fairly skilfully in avoiding them.

Sergei gazed at this scene for some time with curiosity and amazement, then quietly nudged the old man in the side.

"What's the matter with him, Grandad Lodyzhkin?" he asked in a whisper. "They're not going to thrash him, are they?"

"I should say not... It's the likes of him that does the thrashing. He's just playin' up. Must be ill, I expect."

"Is he crackers?" Sergei wondered.

"How should I know. Be quiet!"

"Ow, ow, oo, oo! Silly fools!" the boy yelled louder and louder.

"Begin now, Sergei. I know!" Lodyzhkin ordered suddenly and began turning the barrel-organ handle with a resolute air.

The raucous, off-key notes of the old galop rang round the garden. The people on the balcony froze at once, even the boy was silent for a few seconds.

"Oh, my goodness, they'll make poor Trilly even worse!" the lady in the pale-blue house-coat exclaimed tearfully. "Do send them away at once! And that filthy dog with them. Dogs always have the most dreadful diseases. Why are you standing there like a statue, Ivan?"

With an air of languid disgust she waved her handkerchief at the performers, the skinny red-nosed girl put on a fearsome expression and someone hissed menacingly... The servant in the frock-coat came down from

the balcony quickly and softly and ran up to the barrel-organ with a horrified expression on his face, arms outspread.

"What do you think you are doing!" he wheezed in a choking, frightened, yet at the same time imperiously angry voice. "Who gave you permission? Who let you in? Quick march. Off you go!"

The barrel-organ gave a doleful squeak and fell silent.

"Allow me to explain, kind sir..." Grandad began persuasively.

"That's enough! Be off with you!" cried the frock-coat man with a kind of whistle in his throat.

His plump face turned purple, his eyes opened incredibly wide, as if they had popped out, and began turning like wheels. It was so terrifying that Grandad involuntarily recoiled a couple of paces.

"Come on, Sergei," he said, heaving the barrel-organ hastily onto his back. "Let's be going."

But before they had gone ten paces, some new piercing cries rang out from the balcony.

"Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo! Give me it! I want it! Ah-a-a! Gi-i-ive me! Call it! To me!"

"But, Trilly! Oh, my goodness, Trilly! Oh, dear, bring them back," groaned the first lady. "Ah, how stupid you all are! Did you hear what I said, Ivan? Call those beggars back at once!"

"Hey, there. You! What's your name? Organ-grinder! Come back!" several voices called from the balcony.

Bouncing like a rubber ball, the fat footman ran off in pursuit of the retreating performers, his side-whiskers flying.

"Psst! Musicians! Listen here! Come back! Come back!" he shouted, panting and waving both arms. "My dear old man," he finally clutched hold of Grandad by the sleeve. "Come back! The master and mistress will watch your pantomime. Hurry up!"

"Well, I never!" sighed Grandad, shaking his head, but he walked up to the balcony, took off his barrel-organ, set it up in front of him and began playing the galop from the very point at which he had just been stopped.

The commotion on the balcony abated. The mistress of the house walked right up to the railings with the boy and the gentleman in gold spectacles; the others remained respectfully in the background. From the depths of the garden came the gardener in an apron and stood not far

from Grandad. A yardman also appeared from somewhere and stood behind the gardener. He was a huge bearded man with a sullen, low-browed, pock-marked face and wore a new pink shirt with oblique rows of big black dots.

To the hoarse, stuttering strains of the galop Sergei spread out his mat on the ground, quickly kicked off his canvas pantaloons (they were made from an old sack and adorned with the factory's rectangular stamp on the back, at the broadest point), threw off his old jacket, remaining in his old cotton hose and vest, which, in spite of the many patches, showed off his slender, but strong and supple figure. He had already learnt, by imitating grown-ups, the manners of the professional acrobat. Running onto the mat, he put both hands to his lips, and then flung them out to either side with a theatrical flourish, blowing the audience two swift kisses, it seemed.

With one hand Grandad went on turning the handle of the barrel-organ, coaxing a jangling, coughing tune out of it, and with the other threw various objects to the boy which the latter caught deftly in mid-air. Sergei's repertoire was not big, but he worked well, or "cleanly", as acrobats say, and with a will. He would throw up an empty beer bottle so that it turned over several times in the air, then suddenly catch it on the edge of a plate and balance it like that for several seconds; he juggled with four ivory balls and two candles which he caught in candlesticks; then he juggled with three different objects at the same time, a fan, a wooden cigar and an umbrella. They flew through the air, not touching the ground, until suddenly the umbrella was over his head, the cigar in his mouth, and the fan flitting coquettishly. In conclusion Sergei performed several somersaults on the mat, did a "frog" and an "American knot" and walked on his hands. Having exhausted his supply of "tricks", he again blew the audience two kisses and, breathing heavily, walked over to Grandad to relieve him at the barrel-organ.

Now it was Arto's turn. The dog knew this, and for some time had been jumping up excitedly with all four paws at Grandad, barking at him in sharp, nervous yaps, while the old man was slipping out sideways from the strap. Who knows, perhaps the clever poodle was trying to say that, in his opinion, it was most inadvisable to perform acrobatic exercises when the thermometer showed twenty-eight degrees in the shade? But with a cunning look Grandad Lodyzhkin pulled a thin cornel switch out from behind his back. "I guessed as much!" Arto gave one last irritated bark, then

lazily, reluctantly, got up on his hind legs, his blinking eyes fixed on his master.

"Beg for your supper, Arto! That's it..." said the old man, holding the switch above the poodle's head. "Now turn round. That's right. Turn round. Again, and again. Dance, dog, dance! Sit down! Wha-at? You don't want to? Sit down, I say! A-ah! That's better. Watch it! Now say hello to the ladies and gentlemen! Come on! Arto!" Lodyzhkin raised his voice threateningly.

"Wuff!" the poodle yelped with loathing. Then looked at his master blinking mournfully, and added another two: "Wuff! Wuff!"

"No, my old master doesn't understand me!" these unhappy yelps seemed to say.

"That's more like it. Politeness before all things. Now, let's do a spot of jumping," the old man continued, holding the switch a little way above the ground. "Allez oop! Sticking out your tongue won't help, boy. Allez! Oop! Well done! Now then, *noch ein mal*... Allez ... oop! Allez ... oop! Good boy! I'll give you a carrot when we get home. What, you don't eat carrots? Oh, I forgot. Then take my top hat and ask the ladies and gents. Perhaps they'll give you something a bit tastier."

The old man lifted the dog onto his hind legs and pushed the ancient greasy cap into his mouth which he had referred to with such a subtle sense of humour as his "top hat". Clenching the cap in his teeth and mincing along on his hind legs, Arto went up to the terrace. A small mother-of-pearl purse appeared in the hands of the languid-looking woman. All those around her smiled sympathetically.

"There you are! Didn't I tell you?" Grandad whispered excitedly, bending down to Sergei. "You ask me: I know it all, lad. They'll cough up at least a rouble."

At that moment such a desperate, piercing, almost inhuman howl was heard from the terrace, that Arto dropped the cap in dismay, turned tail and, casting terrified looks behind him, fled back to his master's feet.

"I wa-a-a-ant it!" screamed the curly-headed boy, stamping his feet. "For my own! I want it! The doggy! Trilly wants the doggy-y-y..."

"Oh, my goodness! Oh, dear! Nikolai Apollonych! Heaven help us! Calm down, Trilly, I beg you!" Pandemonium broke out on the balcony again.

"The doggy! Give me it! I want it! Silly fools, trash, devils!" the boy screamed wildly.

"Don't get so upset, my angel!" the lady in the pale-blue négligé babbled over him. "You want to stroke the doggy, do you? Alright, my darling, only just a minute. What do you think, doctor, is it alright for Trilly to stroke the dog?"

"Well, actually, I would not advise it," the doctor said. "But if it's properly disinfected with boric acid, say, or a weak carbolic solution, then ... perhaps..."

"I want the doggy!"

"Just a moment, my sweet, just a moment. So we'll tell them to wash it with boric acid, Doctor, and then... But you mustn't get so upset, Trilly! Bring your dog over here, old man. Don't be afraid. You will be paid. It is healthy, isn't it? I mean, it hasn't got rabies, has it? Or echinococcus?"

"I don't want to stroke it!" Trilly howled, blowing bubbles out of his mouth and nose. "I want to keep it! Silly fools, devils! To keep it just for me! I want to play with it myself... For ever!"

"Listen, old man. Come over here," the lady tried to shout him down. "Oh, Trilly, you'll be the death of Mamma with your screaming. If only they hadn't let these musicians in! Come closer ... closer, I tell you! That's right... Oh, don't get so upset, Trilly, Mamma will do just what you want. I beg you. Do try to calm the boy, Miss. And you, Doctor, please... How much do you want, old man?"

Grandad removed his cap. His face took on an ingratiating, waif-like expression.

"As much as Your Excellency thinks fit, milady. We're simple folk. Any offering is gratefully accepted. I know you'll not begrudge an old man, milady..."

"Oh, how slow-witted you are! Trilly, you'll get a sore throat. Can't you understand, the dog's yours, not mine. So how much? Ten? Fifteen? Twenty?"

"Boo-hoo-hoo! I want it! Give me the doggy! Give it to me!" the boy screamed, aiming a hefty kick at the footman's round paunch.

"What's that ... forgive me, Your Excellency," Lodyzhkin stumbled. "I'm a silly old man... I don't get things straightaway ... and I'm a bit deaf into the bargain ... so what was your ladyship saying? For the dog?"

"Oh, Heaven help us! Are you deliberately pretending to be stupid?" the lady flared up. "Give Trilly some water at once, Nanny! I'm asking you in plain Russian how much you'll sell the dog for. The dog, understand?"

"The doggy! The doggy!" The boy's screams grew even louder than before.

Deeply offended, Lodyzhkin put on his cap.

"I don't trade in dogs, ma'am," he said with cold dignity. "You could say, ma'am, that this dog feeds and clothes the two of us." He pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at Sergei. "So there can't be no selling of it any ways."

Meanwhile Trilly's screams were as piercing as a steam-engine whistle. He was given a glass of water and splashed it furiously in his governess's face.

"Now listen here, you crazy old man! Everything has its price," the lady persisted, pressing her hands to her temples. "Wipe your face at once, Miss, and bring me my migraine mixture. Perhaps your dog costs a hundred roubles? Or two hundred? Or three? Answer me, you blockhead! Doctor, say something to him, for goodness sake!"

"Come on, Sergei," Lodyzhkin muttered gloomily. "Blockhead indeed... Heel, Arto!"

"Now wait a minute, old fellow," the fat gentleman in the gold spectacles boomed in his commanding bass. "Don't play too hard to get, old chap, that's my advice to you. Ten roubles is a pretty good price for your dog, together with you into the bargain... You just think what you're being offered, you ass!"

"Thanking you kindly, sir, only..." Lodyzhkin heaved the barrel-organ onto his shoulders, wheezing hard. "Only selling's out of the question. You'd best try and find some other dog somewhere... Fare you well... You walk in front, Sergei!"

"Do you have a proper passport?" the doctor suddenly roared menacingly. "I know you, canaille!"

"Yardman! Semyon! Throw them out!" the lady cried, her face distorted with anger.

The sullen yardman in the pink shirt advanced on the performers with a threatening air. A terrible uproar broke out on the terrace: Trilly screamed at the top of his voice, his mother groaned, the governess and her assistant wailed frantically, and the doctor boomed out his fruity bass, like an infuriated bumble-bee. But Grandad and Sergei had no time to see how it all ended. Preceded by the thoroughly scared poodle, they hurried to the gates almost at the trot. Behind them strode the yardman, giving

the barrel-organ the odd push to hurry them on and saying in a threatening voice:

"Loafing around here, you good-for-nothings. You can thank your lucky stars you didn't get a thrashing, you old sod. Next time you won't get off so lightly, believe me. I'll drag you by the scruff of the neck to see the chief constable. Riff-raff!"

For a long time the old man and the boy walked along in silence, then suddenly, as if by agreement, they looked at one another and began to laugh: first Sergei began chuckling, then, looking at him with some embarrassment, Lodyzhkin broke into a smile too.

"What was that, Grandad Lodyzhkin? You know it all?" Sergei mimicked him slyly.

"Aye, lad. We got ourselves into a pickle alright," the old organ-grinder shook his head. "But that there boy was a real little terror. How did they manage to bring him up like that, the devil take him? Twenty-five people dancing attendance on him, if you please! If it were up to me, I'd prescribe him a good thrashing. 'Give me the dog,' he says. Just like that. What if he decides he'd like the moon too? Come here, Arto, boy. Eh, what a day we've had today. Can't remember another one like it!"

"What could be better!" Sergei went on poking fun. "One lady presents us with a dress, another gives us a silver rouble. You know it all in advance, Grandad Lodyzhkin."

"You mind what you're saying, smart aleck," the old man retorted good-naturedly. "Remember how fast you ran away from the yardman? I thought I'd never catch you up. He's quite a devil, that yardman."

Coming out of the park, the wandering troupe went down a steep path with loose stones to the sea. The mountains here had receded slightly to make way for a narrow flat strip covered with tide-smoothed pebbles against which the sea was now gently lapping. Some five hundred yards from the shore dolphins were somersaulting in the water, their plump curved backs rising out of it for a brief moment. Far away on the horizon, where the pale-blue satin of the sea was trimmed with a dark-blue velvet ribbon, the slender sails of fishing boats stood motionless, tinted a faint pink by the sun.

"We'll have our dip here, Grandad Lodyzhkin," Sergei announced firmly. While they were walking he had already managed, by hopping first

on one foot, then on the other, to slip out of his baggy trousers. "I'll help you off with the organ."

He undressed quickly, slapped his bare chocolate-tanned body with his hands and plunged into the water, sending up cascades of foaming spray around him.

Grandad undressed slowly. Screwing up his eyes and cupping them with his hand against the sun, he watched Sergei with an affectionate grin.

"He's growin' into a fine lad," Lodyzhkin thought. "A bit too skinny — you can see his ribs, but he'll be a strong fellow alright."

"Hey, Sergei! Don't you go swimmin' too far out. You'll get carried away by a porpoise."

"I'll grab it by the tail!" the boy cried back to him.

Grandad stood for a long time in the sun, his hands under his arms. He ventured into the water very cautiously and, before ducking under it, carefully wetted his red bald pate and shrunken sides. His body was sallow, flabby and feeble, the legs were surprisingly thin, and the back with its sharply protruding shoulder-blades was hunched from many years of carrying the barrel-organ.

"Watch, Grandad Lodyzhkin!" Sergei shouted.

He did a somersault in the water, turning head over heels. Grandad, who had already waded into the sea up to his waist and sat down in it, wheezing blissfully, called back anxiously:

"You mind what you're doin', my lad. Or I'll give you what-for!"

Arto was barking furiously and racing to and fro along the shore. He was worried by the boy swimming so far out. "Why does he have to show off how brave he is?" the poodle fretted. "Why doesn't he stick to dry land. It's much safer."

He waded into the sea up to his belly and lapped at it two or three times with his tongue. But he did not like the salt, and the light waves splashing over the pebbles by the water's edge frightened him. He jumped back onto the beach and began barking at Sergei again. "What's the point of all these silly tricks? Why doesn't he just sit on the beach with the old man? Oh, the trouble we have with that lad!"

"Hey, Sergei, you'd best come out now. That's enough!" the old man called.

"In a minute, Grandad Lodyzhkin. I just want to swim like a steamboat. Oo-oo-oo!"

Eventually he swam to the beach, but before getting dressed he picked up Arto, ran back to the sea with him and threw him far out into the water. The dog swam back at once, his head and ears bobbing above the water, snorting loudly and offendedly. Jumping onto dry land he shook his whole body furiously and clouds of spray flew onto the old man and Sergei.

"Wait a minute, Sergei, is that for us?" said Lodyzhkin, staring up at the hill.

Coming quickly down the path, shouting unintelligibly and waving his hands, was the sullen yardman in the pink shirt with black dots, who had chased the three of them away from the villa a quarter of an hour ago.

"What does he want?" Grandad asked in amazement.

IV

The yardman went on shouting as he trotted clumsily down the path, the sleeves of his shirt fluttering in the wind and the front billowing out like a sail.

"Hey, down there! Wait, you three!"

"May you get wet and never get dry!" Lodyzhkin muttered angrily. "He's come about Arto again."

"Let's show him where he gets off, Grandad!" Sergei suggested bravely.

"That's enough of that... Who do they think they are, for goodness sake!"

"Now listen here..." the panting yardman began still some distance away. "What about selling the dog, eh? There's no talking our master out of it. He's howling the place down. 'Bring me the doggy...' The mistress sent me. 'Buy it at any price,' she said."

"Well, that wasn't very clever of your mistress!" Lodyzhkin, who felt far more confident here, on the beach, than at the villa, suddenly lost his temper. "And in any case who does she think she is? She may be your mistress, but I don't give a tinker's cuss about that. So please ... if you don't mind ... go away and leave us alone, for heaven's sake."

But the yardman was not to be deterred. He sat down on the pebbles, next to the old man, and talked away, jabbing his finger awkwardly in front of him.

"Can't you understand, you blockhead..."

"It's a blockhead I'm talking to," Grandad retorted calmly.

"Now wait a minute ... that's not what I... Here's a numskull and no mistake... Now just think. What's so special about that dog? You could easily get another one, teach it to stand on its hind legs, and there you are. Eh? That's the truth alright, isn't it?"

Grandad was carefully tying the belt round his trousers. To the yardman's persistent questions he replied with feigned indifference:

"Carry on... You'll get my answer straightaway."

"And, just think, brother, you've got a figure straightaway!" the yardman warmed to his task. "Two hundred, or even three hundred roubles cash down! And something to me for my pains, of course... Just think: three hundred in silver! Why, you could open a grocer's shop with that..."

Talking in this way the yardman pulled a piece of sausage out of his pocket and threw it to the poodle. Arto caught it in mid-air, swallowed it at one go and wagged his tail ingratiatingly.

"You finished?" Lodyzhkin asked tersely.

"There's nothing to it. Just give me the dog, and we'll shake on it."

"I see," Grandad drawled mockingly. "Just sell the dog, eh?"

"That's it. Sell the dog. Why not? The young master's like that, you know. When he wants something, everyone gets in an awful tizzy. Gimme this, gimme that! And when his father's there, Heaven help us! The whole place is turned upside down. His father's an engineer, Obolyaninov, perhaps you've heard of him? Builds railways all over Russia. He's a millionaire! And that lad's their only child. A real terror, he is. I want a pony — here you are, my boy. I want a boat — here's a lovely boat for you. They never refuse him anything."

"What about the moon?"

"What do you mean, the moon?"

"Hasn't he ever asked for the moon out of the sky?"

"Well, I never ... asking for the moon!" the yardman was somewhat taken aback. "So how about it, friend? Is it a deal?"

Grandad, who had by now had time to pull on his brown jacket, green at the seams, drew himself up proudly, as far as his crooked back allowed him.

"Let me ask you one thing, lad," he began not without solemnity. "Say you had a brother, see, or a friend, ever since childhood. Don't go feeding

the dog that sausage, mate. You'd do better to eat it yourself. You won't win him over with that, I can tell you. So, say you had the best friend in the world ... ever since childhood... How much would you sell him for?"

"You can't compare it with that!"

"Oh, yes, you can. Go and tell that to your master who builds railways," Grandad raised his voice. "You go and tell him that not everything is for sale. That's right! And it's no use stroking the dog like that. Come here, Arto, you son of a dog, or I'll give you what-for! Let's be going, Sergei."

"You're an old fool," the yardman finally exploded.

"A fool I may be, but you're a knave. Judas! Scum!" Lodyzhkin cursed him. "And when you see your mistress, bow to her and say: respects to you and yours with love from us. Roll up the mat, Sergei! Eh, my back, my poor old back! Let's be off."

"So that's the way you want it!" the yardman drawled meaningfully.

"Put that in your pipe and smoke it!" the old man retorted perkily.

The performers trudged back up the path by the sea shore. Sergei happened to glance down and saw the yardman was following them. He looked sullen and thoughtful. With great concentration and all five fingers he was scratching the back of his tousled ginger head under the cap which had slipped over his eyes.

V

Grandad Lodyzhkin had a favourite spot between Miskhor and Alupka, just below the low road, which was ideal for having breakfast. It was here that he led his companions. Not far from the bridge over a fast-running and dirty mountain torrent a spring of ice-cold water rose out of the ground in the shade of crooked oaks and leafy nut-trees. It had formed a shallow pond in the soil, from which it slithered into a brook, a slender snake, glistening in the grass like living silver. By this spring in the morning and evening you could always find pious mountain goats drinking the water and performing their sacred ablutions.

"Our sins are many, but our meal is frugal," said Grandad, sitting down in the cool shade of a nut-tree. "Now then, Sergei, here goes!"

Out of his canvas bag he took some bread, ten red tomatoes, a piece of Bessarabian cheese and a bottle of olive oil. The salt was tied in a rag of

dubious cleanliness. Before eating the old man crossed himself many times, whispering something quickly. Then he broke the chunk of bread into three unequal portions: the biggest he gave to Sergei (the boy was growing — he had to eat), and the second, slightly smaller, he left for the poodle, taking the smallest for himself.

"In the name of the Father and the Son. The eyes of all do gaze upon Thee, Lord," he whispered, busily handing out the portions and pouring oil on them from the bottle. "Eat up, Sergei!"

Without hurrying, slowly and silently, like all real labourers, the three began their humble repast. The only sound was the chewing of three pairs of jaws. Arto ate his portion apart from the other two, stretched out on his stomach, with both front paws on the bread. Grandad and Sergei in turn dipped the ripe tomatoes, from which blood-red juice ran over their lips and hands, into the salt, and ate them with the cheese and bread. When they had finished, they drank from the spring, placing the tin mug under the gushing stream of water. It was crystal clear, delicious to taste and so cold that the outside of the mug misted over. The midday heat and their long path had exhausted the performers, who had been up since crack of dawn. Grandad's eyes kept closing. Sergei was yawning and stretching.

"How about lying down and taking a little nap?" Grandad asked. "Let me have one more drink of water. Eh, that was good!" he exclaimed, taking the mug away from his mouth and drawing a deep breath, as the bright drops dripped off his moustache and beard. "If I were Tsar, I'd drink this water all the time ... from dawn to dusk. Come here, Arto! The Lord hath fed us and none did see, and he who saw us no wrong did he. Hey, ho, to sleep we go!"

The old man and the boy lay down beside each other on the grass, using their old jackets as pillows. The dark foliage of gnarled and spreading oak-trees rustled overhead, with patches of clear blue sky glimpsing through it. The stream, running from stone to stone, gurgled so insistently and so enticingly that it seemed to be casting a spell with its soporific babbling. Grandad tossed and turned for a while, wheezing and muttering, but to Sergei his voice seemed to be coming from some soft and sleepy distance, and the words were as strange as those of a fairy tale.

"First thing I'll do is buy you a suit: pink tricot trimmed with gold ... and pink satin shoes to match... You should see the circuses in Kiev and Kharkov, or in the town of Odessa, f'r instance, lad ... all shinin' with

electricity... An audience of five thousand, or even more ... who am I to say? We'll give you an Italian surname. What sort of a surname is Yestifeyev or Lodyzhkin, say? Just rubbish — there's no imagination in them. But we'll put you up on the poster as Antonio, f'r instance, or Enrico or Alfonso, they're not bad either..."

The boy did not hear the rest. A gentle and sweet drowsiness took possession of him, binding and weakening his body. Grandad fell asleep too, suddenly losing the thread of his beloved after-dinner reflections on Sergei's brilliant future in the circus. At one point he thought he heard Arto growling at someone. For an instant a semi-conscious and disturbing memory of the yardman in the pink shirt flashed through his befuddled head, but worn out by exhaustion and the heat, he could not get up and only called lazily to the dog without opening his eyes:

"Where you goin', Arto? I'll give you what-for!"

But his thoughts grew muddled at once and dissolved into heavy, shapeless visions.

Grandad was woken by Sergei's voice. The boy was running up and down on the other side of the stream, giving piercing whistles and loud shouts, worried and frightened.

"Ici, Arto! Come back! Arto, come back!"

"What's all the yelling about, Sergei?" Lodyzhkin asked querulously, stretching out his stiff arm with difficulty.

"The dog disappeared while we were asleep, that's what!" the boy replied rudely in an irritated voice. "He's gone."

He gave a shrill whistle and called out once more:

"Ar-to-o-o!"

"That's nonsense! He'll soon be back," Grandad said. Yet he got up quickly and began calling the dog in his angry, old man's falsetto, hoarse from sleep.

"Come here, Arto, you son of a dog!"

With short, faltering steps he ran hastily over the bridge and up to the highroad, still calling the dog. The even, white strip of the road stretched out before him visible to the eye for some five hundred yards, but there was not a single figure, nor a single shadow on it.

"Arto! Ar-to!" the old man wailed miserably.

Suddenly he stopped, bent down and squatted on his heels.

"So that's what it's all about!" the old man said in a hollow voice. "Sergei! Come here a minute, Sergei."

"What have you found up there?" the boy retorted rudely, walking over to Lodyzhkin. "The day before yesterday?"

"What's this, Sergei? What's this then, eh? Understand?" the old man asked in a barely audible whisper.

He looked at the boy with a pitiful, lost expression, and his hand pointing at the ground shook hard.

On the road in the white dust lay a large half-eaten piece of sausage, and next to it were dog's footprints pointing in all directions.

"He's stolen the dog, the rogue!" Grandad whispered fearfully, still squatting on his haunches. "It must have been him, no doubt about it. Remember how he kept givin' Arto sausage by the sea."

"No doubt about it," Sergei repeated darkly and angrily.

Grandad's staring eyes suddenly filled with large tears and began to blink rapidly. He covered them with his hands.

"What can we do now, Sergei? Eh? Now what can we do?" the old man asked, swaying backwards and forwards and sobbing helplessly.

"What can we do, what can we do!" Sergei mimicked him angrily. "Get up, Grandad Lodyzhkin, and let's be going!"

"Let's be going," repeated the old man, miserably and meekly, getting up from the ground. "Alright then, let's be going, Sergei!"

Losing his patience Sergei shouted at the old man as if he were a little child:

"Stop acting the fool, old man. Folk can't just take away other folk's dogs. What are you gawking at me like that for? I'm telling the truth, aren't I? We'll go and say: 'Give us back our dog!' And if they won't, we'll go to the magistrate, and have done with it."

"To the magistrate ... yes ... of course... That's right, to the magistrate..." Lodyzhkin repeated with a senseless, bitter smile. But his eyes looked guilty and ashamed. "To the judge ... yes. Only the trouble is, Sergei, we can't go to the magistrate."

"Why can't we? The law's the law. It don't matter who you are," the boy interrupted him impatiently.

"Don't you ... don't be angry with me, Sergei. They won't give the dog back to us." Grandad lowered his voice furtively. "I'm worried about my passport. Did you hear what that gent said today? He asked me if I had a proper passport. And that's the whole trouble. My passport..." A frightened look appeared on Grandad's face and he whispered so low Sergei

could hardly hear him. "My passport really belongs to someone else."

"What do you mean—someone else?"

"That's right — someone else. I lost mine in Taganrog, or maybe it was stolen. Then I spent the next two years hiding, bribing people and writing petitions... In the end I saw it was hopeless. I was living like a hare, scared stiff of everybody. Not a moment's peace. Then I met this Greek at a doss-house in Odessa. 'That's child's play,' he said. 'You just cough up twenty-five roubles, Grandpa, and I'll set you up with a passport for the rest of your life.' Well, I thought it over and decided it was worth the risk. 'It's a deal,' I told him. And ever since then I've been using somebody else's passport."

"Eh, Grandad, Grandad!" Sergei sighed deeply with tears in his eyes. "I'm so sorry about the dog... He's such a good one..."

"Seryozha, my lad!" the old man stretched out his trembling hands to him. "If I had a proper passport, do you think I'd worry about them being generals? I'd take them by the throat! 'Now then! Excuse me! What right have you to steal other people's dogs? What law allows you to do that?' But we've had it, Sergei. As soon as I go to the police-station, they'll say: 'Show us your passport. So you're Martyn Lodyzhkin, a townsman from Samara, are you?' But I'm not even Lodyzhkin, lad, or a townsman. I'm a peasant and my real name's Ivan Dudkin. Heaven only knows who Lodyzhkin is. For all I know, he might be a thief or an escaped convict. Or even a murderer, eh? No, Sergei, we can't do anything about it. Anything at all, Sergei..."

Grandad's voice broke off and he began to sob. Tears again trickled down the deep, sun-tanned wrinkles. Sergei, who had listened to the weakened old man in silence, frowning and pale, suddenly took him by the arm and helped him up.

"Come on, Grandad," he said firmly and gently at the same time. "To hell with the passport. Let's go. We can't spend the night on the highroad."

"That's my boy, good lad," the old man quavered, trembling all over. "He was such a bundle of fun, that Arto of ours... We'll never find another one like him..."

"That's enough of that... You just get up," Sergei ordered. "Here, let me brush the dust off you. You are in a bad way, Grandad."

The performers did not work again that day. In spite of his youth, Ser-

gei understood only too well the meaning of the terrible word "passport". So he did not insist any longer on searching for Arto, going to the magistrate, or any other decisive measures. But as he walked along beside Grandad his face retained its new stubborn air of concentration, as if he had thought of something extremely serious and important.

Without previous agreement, but obviously from one and the same hidden motive, they deliberately went a long way round so as to pass Friendship Villa again. In front of the gates they stopped for a moment in the vague hope of seeing Arto or at least hearing him bark in the distance.

But the wrought-iron gates of the magnificent villa were firmly closed, and silence reigned, fragrant, solemn and imperturbable, in the shady garden under the slender, sorrowful cypress-trees.

"Fine folk they are!" hissed the old man, putting all the sharp bitterness that now filled his heart into these words.

"That's enough, let's go," the boy ordered grimly and tugged his companion's sleeve.

"Perhaps Arto will run away from them, eh, Sergei?" the old man suddenly sobbed again. "Eh? What do you think, lad?"

But the boy did not reply. He was walking in front with big, resolute strides. His eyes were staring down at the road, and his thin brows were set in an angry frown.

VI

They walked to Alupka in silence. Grandad wheezed and sighed all the way, while Sergei's face retained the same air of grim determination. They stopped for the night at a dirty Turkish coffee-house with the romantic name of Yldyz, which is Turkish for "star". They found themselves in the company of Greek stonemasons, Turkish navvies, some Russian labourers hired by the day, and also a few suspicious-looking vagrants, of whom so many roam around the south of Russia. All of them, as soon as the coffee-house closed at the appointed hour, lay down on the benches lining the walls, or on the floor itself, while those with a bit of experience took the by no means unnecessary precaution of placing under their heads anything they possessed of value.

It was long after midnight when Sergei, who had been lying on the floor beside Grandad, got up cautiously and began to dress without

a sound. Through the broad windows the pale moonlight poured into the room, spreading its oblique, quivering coverlet over the floor and giving the faces of the people sleeping side by side, a tortured, deathly expression.

"Ver you goink so late, boy?" the owner of the coffee-house, a young Turk called Ibrahim, asked Sergei sleepily at the door.

"Open up and no questions!" Sergei replied in a grim, business-like tone. "Come on, shake a leg, you Turkish delight!"

Yawning, scratching himself and clicking his tongue reproachfully, Ibrahim unlocked the door. The narrow streets of the Tatar bazaar were immersed in deep dark-blue shadows, which covered the roadway with a jagged pattern and reached the foot of the houses on the other side, where the low walls shone whitely in the moonlight. On the distant outskirts dogs were barking. From somewhere on the highroad came the clear, regular clip-clop of a horse ambling slowly along.

Walking past the white mosque with a green, onion-shaped dome, surrounded by a silent crowd of dark cypresses, the boy went down a narrow, crooked alley to the highroad. For the sake of lightness Sergei had not taken his upper garments and wore only his tricot. The moon was shining on his back, and the boy's shadow, a strange, black, foreshortened figure, ran ahead of him. On either side of the highroad lurked dark leafy bushes. A bird in them was calling monotonously at regular intervals in a high, gentle voice: "I snooze!.. I snooze!.." It seemed to be faithfully guarding a sad secret in the nocturnal silence, trying in vain to struggle against sleep and tiredness, and complaining quietly and hopelessly: "I snooze... I snooze!" And above the dark bushes and the bluish caps of the distant forests, its two peaks piercing the heavens, rose Mount Ai-Petri, as light, sharp and airy as if it were cut out of silver cardboard.

Sergei was somewhat daunted by this awesome silence, in which his footsteps rang so clearly and boldly, but at the same time his heart was flooded with a kind of exhilarating courage that made him feel dizzy. At a bend in the road the sea suddenly appeared before him. Huge and calm, it rippled with a serene majesty. From the horizon to the shore stretched a narrow, quivering strip of silver; it disappeared in the middle of the sea, sparkling only here and there, then suddenly blazed like live, glittering metal right at the edge, encircling the shore.

Sergei slipped noiselessly through the wooden gate into the park. It was

pitch black there, under the leafy trees. You could hear the sound of a babbling brook in the distance and feel its damp, cold breath. The wooden planks of the bridge rang clearly underfoot. The water below was black and fearful. Then at last came the tall iron gates, with their lacy carving, entwined with strands of creeping wisteria. The moonlight that found its way through the thicket of trees dappled the carving of the gates with faint phosphorescent patches. On the other side lay darkness and a keen, frightening silence.

For a few moments Sergei experienced a sense of hesitation, almost fear. But he overcame these agonising feelings in himself and whispered:

"I will climb in! No matter what!"

Climbing up proved to be easy for him. The elegant wrought-iron scrolls forming the pattern on the gates provided firm support for his strong hands and small muscular legs. Above the gates a broad stone arch curved from post to post very high up. Sergei climbed gropingly onto it, lay on his stomach, then lowered his legs on the other side and began gradually to let his body down as well, searching all the while with his feet for some jutting ledge. Thus he let himself down until he was hanging almost full-length over the arch, only his fingers holding onto the edge, yet still his feet found no support. He could not have known that the arch over the gateway protruded much further on the inside than on the outside, and as his arms grew numb and his suspended body heavier, he felt a growing sense of terror.

Finally he could bear it no longer. His fingers clutching the sharp edge let go and he went flying down.

He heard the large gravel crunch under him and felt a sharp pain in his knees. For a few seconds he crouched on all fours, stunned by the fall. He was sure that all the inmates of the villa would wake up now, the sullen yardman in the pink shirt would appear, and there would be a terrible commotion... Yet the deep, majestic silence still reigned in the garden as before. Only now there was a low, monotonous buzzing sound:

"Zzz ... zzz ... zzz..."

"Oh, that's the buzzing in my ears!" Sergei realised. He stood up; everything was terrifying, mysterious and fantastically beautiful in the garden, which seemed full of fragrant dreams. Barely visible in the darkness, flowers swayed quietly, inclining to one another with a vague anxiety, as if they were whispering, and glancing round. The slender dark

cypresses nodded their pointed crowns slowly with a musing reproachful air. And above the brook, in the thicket of bushes, the tired little bird fought against sleep, repeating with mournful resignation:

"I snooze!.. I snooze!.. I snooze!.."

At night, amid the tangled shadows on the paths, Sergei did not recognise the place. He walked for a long time along the crunching gravel before he found the house.

Never before had the boy felt so painfully and totally helpless, abandoned and alone as now. To him the enormous house seemed full of ruthless, hidden enemies, who were watching every movement of the small, weak boy secretly from the dark windows with an evil smile. Silently and impatiently these enemies were waiting for a signal, for some deafening, angry and terrible command.

"Not in the house ... he can't be in the house!" the boy whispered to himself, as if in a dream. "He'd howl there and they'd get fed up with it..."

He walked round the villa. At the back, in the big yard, were several outbuildings of a simpler, more ordinary appearance, obviously intended for the servants. Here, as in the villa itself, there was no light in any of the windows; only the moon's reflection shone on the dark panes in a deathly, uneven light. "I'll never get away from here, never!" Sergei thought miserably. For an instant he remembered Grandad, the old barrel-organ, the nights in coffee-houses and the lunches by cool springs. "There'll be no more of that ever again!" he repeated sadly to himself. But the more hopeless his thoughts became, the more his fear gave way to a kind of dull and calmly malicious despair.

A faint, almost groaning yelp suddenly reached his ears. The boy stopped and caught his breath, standing on tiptoe, muscles tensed. There was another yelp. The sounds seemed to be coming from the stone basement by which Sergei was standing and which had a row of crude small rectangular openings without glass. Treading on a flower pattern, the boy went up to the wall, put his face to one of the vents and whistled. There was a quiet, vigilant sound from somewhere below, which stopped quickly.

"Arto! Arto!" Sergei called in a tremulous whisper.

A frantic barking immeqiately filled the whole garden, echoing in all the corners. In that barking as well as a joyful welcome there was a mixture of

grievance, anger, and a sense of physical pain. You could hear the dog straining hard to break out of the dark cellar, trying to free himself from something.

"Arto, boy! Arto!" the boy repeated tearfully.

"Shut up, you devil!" shouted a brutal bass voice from below. "Take that!"

There was a thwacking sound in the cellar. The dog broke into a long, intermittent howl.

"Don't you dare beat him! Don't you dare beat the dog, you scum!" Sergei screamed wildly, scratching at the stone wall.

What happened then Sergei could remember only vaguely, as if in a raging feverish delirium. The cellar door was flung wide open with a bang, and out of it ran the yardman. In nothing but his underpants, bare-footed, bearded and pale from the bright moonlight shining straight into his face, he looked to Sergei like a giant, a furious monster out of a fairy tale.

"Who goes there? I'll shoot!" his voice thundered over the garden. "Thieves! Robbers!"

At that very moment out of the darkness of the open door, like a white bouncing ball, raced Arto barking loudly. A piece of rope was dangling from his neck.

The boy had no time for the dog. The yardman's menacing appearance filled him with a supernatural terror, fettering his legs and paralysing his small thin body. Fortunately, however, this stupor did not last for long. Almost unconsciously Sergei uttered a long, piercing, desperate cry and began to run away he knew not where, numb with terror.

He flew like a bird, hitting the ground firmly and often with his feet, which had suddenly become as strong as two steel springs. Beside him, barking joyfully, raced Arto. And thudding along behind them heavily in the sand came the yardman, cursing furiously.

Sergei almost ran into the gates, but instantly sensed instinctively, rather than thought, that he could not get out here. Between the stone wall and the line of cypresses along it was a narrow, dark hole. Without reflecting, driven by a sense of terror, Sergei bent down, dived into it and began running along next to the wall. The sharp needles of the cypress-trees, smelling strongly of resin, beat his face. He tripped on tree roots and fell down, scratching his hands till they bled, but immediately leapt

up again, not noticing the pain, and ran on, bent almost double, deaf to his own shouts. Arto raced along behind him.

So he ran along the narrow corridor formed by the high wall on one side and the dense row of cypress-trees, on the other, ran like a small terror-stricken wild beast caught in an endless trap. His mouth was dry, and each breath stabbed his chest like a thousand needles. The yardman's heavy footsteps could be heard now to the right, now to the left, as the fear-crazed boy careered on wildly, passing the gates several times and diving back into the dark, narrow corridor.

Eventually he could run no more. The wild terror gradually gave way to a cold inertia, a dull indifference to all danger. He sat down under a tree, pressed his exhausted body against the trunk and closed his eyes tight. Nearer and nearer came the thud of his enemy's footsteps, crunching in the sand. Arto whined quietly, burying his head between Sergei's knees.

A few paces away came the sound of branches being pushed aside. Sergei happened to glance upwards and suddenly leapt to his feet in a surge of incredible joy. He had only just noticed that the wall opposite the spot where he was sitting was very low, not more than three or four feet high, True, the top was lined with broken glass set in lime, but Sergei did not worry about that. In a flash he grabbed Arto round the middle and placed his front paws on the wall. The clever dog understood straightaway. He scrambled quickly onto the wall, wagged his tail and barked triumphantly.

Sergei climbed up after him, just as a big dark figure came lumbering through the cypress branches. Then two lithe, nimble bodies, the dog and the boy, jumped down quickly and lightly onto the road. They were followed by a filthy stream of foul and furious curses.

Whether the yardman was less fleet of foot than the two friends, or worn out from careering round the garden or simply thought he had no hope of catching the fugitives up, he did not pursue them any further. Nevertheless they ran on for a long time without stopping, strong and agile, as if winged by the joy of their salvation. The poodle quickly regained his customary lightheartedness. Sergei kept looking round fearfully, but Arto was already jumping up, shaking his ears and the piece of rope joyfully, and trying to lick the boy's face as they ran.

Sergei did not recover until they reached the spring, the one where he

and Grandad had breakfasted the day before. Bending down together, the dog and the boy drank long and greedily of the cold, refreshing water. They kept pushing each other out of the way and lifting their heads for a moment to get their breath back, as the water ran down from their lips, then bending down again to the spring with renewed thirst, unable to drag themselves away. And when at last they stepped back from the spring and went on their way, the water splashed and gurgled in their bulging stomachs. The danger was past, all the horrors of the night had vanished without trace, and now the two of them could walk gaily and lightly along the white road brightly lit by the moon, between the dark bushes, which already exuded a morning dampness and the sweet scent of refreshed foliage.

At the Yldyz coffee-house Ibrahim greeted the boy with a reproachful whisper:

"Vot you been up to, eh? Ver you been all this time? Oi-oi-oi, you bad boy..."

Sergei did not want to wake Grandad, but Arto did it for him. In a flash he found the old man among the piles of prostrate bodies on the floor and, before Grandad realised what was happening, started licking his cheeks, eyes, nose and mouth, yelping happily. Grandad woke up, saw the rope round the poodle's neck and the dust-covered boy lying by his side and understood everything. He tried to ask Sergei some questions, but got nothing by way of reply. The boy was already fast asleep, arms spread-eagled and mouth open wide.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

IN A SELECT BOYS' SCHOOL

Translated by *Olga Shartse*

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's (1821-1881) novels *Crime and Punishment*, *The Karamazov Brothers*, and *The Idiot* are known to every cultured person in the world. No other writer has ever described as powerfully and impressively as Dostoyevsky the sufferings of people, their searching thoughts and their pangs of conscience. All Dostoyevsky's books are meant for adults, and they are anything but light reading. But in almost every one of them there are pages which the author himself used to read to his five-year-old daughter and her friends, invariably evoking a strong emotional response from them. Dostoyevsky intended, when he had the time to spare, to select these chapters from his books and publish them as a separate volume for children. But he did not live to do this. He died in 1881 at the age of sixty. It was not until two years later that the book entitled *For Russian Children* was actually published. Included in it were Dostoyevsky's short stories "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party", "The Serf Marei", and extracts from the novels *The Raw Youth*, *Netochka Nezvanova*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Karamazov Brothers*. The book has since had many editions.

Dostoyevsky knew the inner world of children well, yet finding his own childhood memories not embracing enough he wrote to a friend of his: "Please tell me everything you know about children happenings, habits, questions and answers, children's talk, traits, family ties, piety, villainy and innocence, teachers, Latin)..."

His attitude to children Dostoyevsky put in the following words: "I have been studying them all my life, and I have loved them very much..." But this was even better expressed by one of Dostoyevsky's characters: "I shall most humbly return my ticket to heaven for just one tear shed by an innocently tortured child."

Sergei Mikhalkov, a Soviet poet, said in the foreword for the collection *For Children* published in 1971 to mark the hundred-and-fiftieth birth anniversary of Dostoyevsky: "Only a very profound love for children felt by a man whose heart aches for every tear, every wrong done to a defenceless creature, could inspire these words."

The present short story has been chosen from the collection *For Children*. It tells about an illegitimate son of a country squire and a serf woman, who has been placed in a select boarding-school where he suffers all the humiliations of an outcast admitted to a privileged society out of charity.

A bell rang out strongly and clearly every two or even three seconds, but it did not ring alarm, for the sound was pleasant and flowing, and suddenly I recognised it, it was a sound I knew: the bell was rung at the red Church of St Nicholas opposite our boarding-school, at that ancient Moscow church which I remember so well, an intricately ornamented, many-domed church, with columns too, built in the reign of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, and I also realised that Easter Week was just over and that newborn tiny green leaves were already trembling on the sickly birch-trees in the Touchards' front garden. The bright late-afternoon sun was pouring its slanting light into our classroom, and I had a visitor sitting in my little room to the left of the classroom where Touchard had isolated me from the "counts' and senators' children" already a year ago. Yes, I, a boy without kith or kin, suddenly had a visitor, the first time since I have been living in Touchard's boarding-school. I recognised my visitor at once, the moment she entered my room: it was my mother, I recognised her although I had not seen her once after the day she took me to the village church for Holy Communion and a pigeon flew across under the dome. The two of us were sitting in the room, and I furtively took stock of her. Many years later I found out that she had made the journey to Moscow at her own expense, pitiful though her means were, almost on the quiet from those to whose care she had been entrusted, and only so she could see me. Another curious thing was that when she came in and spoke a few words with Touchard, she did not tell me that she was my mother. She was sitting beside me and I remember wondering why she spoke so little. She had a small bundle which she was now untying: inside were six oranges, several honey-cakes, and two ordinary loaves of white bread. The bread offended me and, with a hurt air, I remarked that the food we had here was very good and that we were all given a whole loaf of white bread each for tea every day.

"Never mind, dear heart, I just thought in my simplicity that maybe the school didn't give you enough to eat, so don't mind, dearest."

"And Antonina Vasilyevna, Madame Touchard, will be offended too. And the boys will laugh at me."

"You mean you won't take it? But maybe you will eat it later?"

"Maybe ... just leave it then."

I did not even touch the things she brought: the oranges and honey-cakes lay on the table before me, while I sat there with lowered eyes and

an air of great dignity. Who knows, maybe I very much wanted to let her see that her visit embarrassed me, that I was ashamed even before my classmates, and to show her what I felt: "You are disgracing me and you don't even realise it!" Oh, already then I had been running after Touchard with a clothes-brush to see that not a speck of dust settled on his coat! I also pictured all the taunts I would have to endure from the boys as soon as she left, and maybe even from Touchard himself, and in my heart there was no sympathy for her whatever. Out of the corner of my eye I looked at her old, darkish dress, her rather coarse, almost a working woman's hands, her very coarse boots, and her pinched face; her forehead was already lined, although Antonina Vasilyevna said to me later that evening after my mother had gone:

"Your *maman* must have been very pretty once."

And so, there we sat, my mother and I, when suddenly Agafya came in with a tray upon which stood a cup of coffee. It was late afternoon and at this hour the Touchards always had coffee in their sitting-room. My mother thanked the servant and declined the coffee. Later, I found out that she never drank coffee because it made her heart palpitate. The thing is that the Touchards apparently regarded her visit and their permitting her to see me an extraordinary concession on their part, and so the cup of coffee they sent her was, so to say, nothing less than a feat of humaneness, relatively speaking, which did enormous credit to their civilised feelings and European notions. And my mother, as ill luck would have it, had refused the offering.

Touchard sent for me and told me to take all my exercise-books and textbooks and show them to my mother: "So that she'll see how much knowledge you have acquired in my establishment." Here Antonina Vasilyevna pursed her lips and said to me with a sneer:

"Our coffee wasn't to your mother's liking, I'm afraid."

I collected some exercise-books and carried them to my waiting mother past the "counts' and senators' sons" who had crowded in the classroom and were peeping at us. And, strange thing, I actually enjoyed carrying out Touchard's order to the letter. I started opening my exercise-books methodically before my mother and explaining: "This is a lesson from French grammar, this exercise was dictated to us, here is the conjugation of the auxiliary verbs *avoir* and *être*, this is my geography book with a description of the principal towns of Europe and all the continents" and so

on, and so on. I went on explaining things for half an hour or more in a small, even voice, my eyes lowered like a well-behaved boy's. I knew that Mother did not understand a thing about school subjects and very likely she could not even write, but that's just what made my role so gratifying. Still, I was unable to tire her, she went on listening to me intently, never interrupting me, listening with rapt attention and even awe, so that finally I myself grew bored and stopped. She looked sad, I must say, and there was something pitiful in her face.

She rose and prepared to leave, when suddenly Touchard himself came in and asked her with an idiotically important air if she was pleased with her son's marks. Mother started mumbling something and thanking him incoherently; Antonina Vasilyevna entered the room too. Mother started begging both of them not to "forsake the poor orphan, because he was no better than an orphan now, and to treat him kindly..." With tears in her eyes she bowed to them, to husband and wife separately, bowing very low, exactly as the common people bow before persons of importance when they come begging them for something. The Touchards did not expect this, and Antonina Vasilyevna seemed to soften and, of course, instantly changed the conclusion she had come to about the rejected cup of coffee. Touchard, with intensified importance, replied humanely that he treated all the boys alike, all the boys here were "his children" and he was "their father", and that he placed me almost on the same footing with the senators' and counts' sons, which should be appreciated, and more in the same vein. Mother only bowed and blushed, and finally she turned to me and with tears glinting in her eyes said: "Goodbye, dearest."

And then she kissed me, or rather I let myself be kissed. Obviously she would have liked to kiss me again, to hug me, hold me close, but she was ashamed to do this in front of people, or perhaps some bitter thought upset her then, or maybe it had come home to her now that I felt ashamed of her; anyway, she bowed once more to the Touchards and made for the door in great haste. I just stood where I was.

"*Mais suivez donc votre mère...*" Antonina Vasilyevna told me. "*Il n'a pas de coeur, cet enfant!*"*

In response Touchard shrugged as much as to say: "I'm training him for a lackey, am I not?"

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* See your mother off... What a heartless child! (*Fr.*)

Obediently I went down the stairs after my mother, and then out to the front porch. I knew that we were being watched from the window. My mother faced the church and crossed herself devoutly three times; her lips were quivering; the big bell up in the belfry boomed rhythmically and resonantly. She turned to me and, unable to restrain herself, put both hands on my shoulders and burst into tears, crying over my head.

"Don't, mama ... the shame of it ... they can see us from the window, you know..."

She started, and said hurriedly:

"Well, God bless you ... may the angels in heaven keep guard over you, may the Mother of God, may Saint Nicholas... O Lord, O Lord," she reiterated nervously, crossing and crossing me, trying to make as many crosses over me as quickly as she could. "My dear heart, my darling! Oh wait, dear..."

She thrust her hand into a pocket, brought out a blue check handkerchief with one corner tied into a tight knot, and started undoing it ... but it was too tight to undo.

"Well, never mind, take the hankie too, it's clean, it might come in useful, forgive me, dear, that's all I have myself just now... Forgive me, dear."

I accepted the handkerchief, although I wanted to tell her that we were very well provided with everything by Mr. Touchard and Antonina Vasilyevna, and had no need of anything, but I held my tongue and took the handkerchief.

She went away at last.

The oranges and honey-cakes had been devoured by the senators' and counts' children in my absence, and my four twenty-kopek coins were immediately confiscated by Lambert. With the money they bought pies and chocolates at the pastry shop, and did not even offer me any.

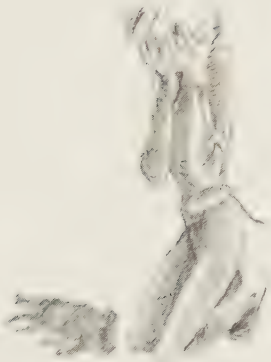
...Six months passed, and it was already October, windy and rainy. I forgot all about my mother. Oh, by then hatred, blind hatred for everything had already seeped into my heart, filling it to satiation. Although I ran after Touchard with a clothes-brush as before, I already hated him with my whole being, hated him more and more with every day. And it was then, in the melancholy dusk of one autumn evening, that I started going through my drawer for some reason or other and suddenly, in the far corner, saw her blue cambric hankie which had been lying there since

I had thrust it in that day. I took it out and inspected it with some curiosity. The corner still showed the creases of the tight knot it had been tied into, and even a clear imprint of a coin. I put the hankie back where I had found it, and pushed in the drawer. It happened to be the eve of a holiday, and the bell was ringing for evening service. The boys had already gone home for the holiday, leaving straight after dinner, and only Lambert stayed behind because nobody had come to fetch him. I don't know why. Although I still took beatings from him as before, I gleaned a lot of information from him and he seemed to have a need in me. We talked the whole evening through about the Lepage pistols, which neither of us had ever seen, about Circassian swords and how they slashed, and also how wonderful it would be to get together a gang of highwaymen. At ten o'clock we went to bed; I pulled the blanket over my head and drew the blue hankie from under my pillow. An hour earlier I had fetched it from my drawer I don't know what for, and as soon as our beds had been made for us hid it under my pillow. Quickly, I pressed it to my face, and suddenly started kissing it. "Mama, mama," I whispered, remembering, and my chest cringed as if held in a vice. I closed my eyes and saw her face with the quivering lips when she crossed herself, facing the church, and then crossed me and I told her: "The shame of it ... people are watching." "Oh mummy, mummy darling, it was the one and only time you ever came to see me here... Oh Mummy, where are you now, my visitor from faraway? Do you think about your poor boy whom you came to see?.. Show yourself to me if only once, come to me in a dream at least so I can tell you how much I love you, so I can hug you and kiss your dear blue eyes and tell you that I'm not ashamed of you at all any more, that I loved you even then, that my heart ached terribly, but I just sat there like a lackey. Will you know me now, can you hear me? Mummy, mummy, do you remember that pigeon in the village church?"

Dmitri Grigorovich

THE INDIA RUBBER BOY

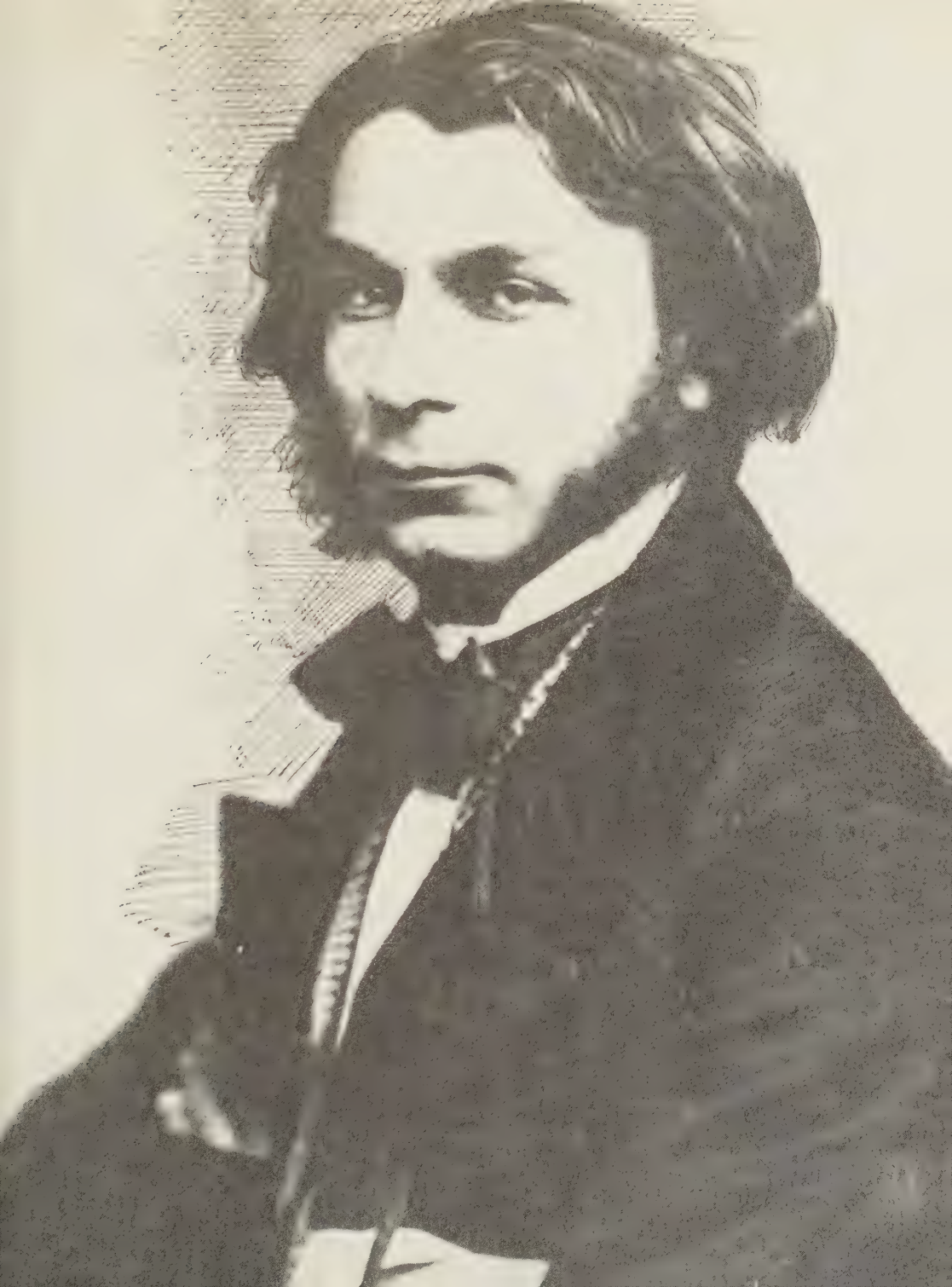
Translated by *Olga Shartse*



Dmitri Grigorovich (1822-1899) was born into a family of gentlefolk and spent his childhood in a provincial town. His father died when he was five years old, and he was brought up by his mother and grandmother – French ladies who hardly knew any Russian, and so the boy learnt his native tongue from their serf servants and his father's butler. However, the future chronicler of Russian village life had to forget what Russian he knew when he was placed in a French boarding-school in Moscow. After finishing school, he became enrolled in the military engineering college in St. Petersburg. His first impressions of this college were extremely painful, but then his acquaintance with Fyodor Dostoyevsky and other students made the savage customs practised there easier to bear.

Grigorovich was soon compelled to leave the college. He entered the Academy of Arts, but only studied there for two years as the trouble he had with his eyes made drawing and painting impossible. Those two years, however, left an unquestionable imprint on his writing. He made his first steps in literature after making the acquaintance of the poet Nekrasov. Grigorovich's novella *Anton Goremyka* in which he realistically portrayed the life of Russian peasants, living under the yoke of serfdom, evoked the sympathy of the readers and won swift popularity.

And his novella *The India Rubber Boy* went straight to the hearts of young readers and is one of their best-loved stories till this day.



I

It was only on the playbill that Bekker's pupil was called "The India Rubber Boy"; his real name was Petya, but in all honesty he should have been called a poor boy.

He had a very short and simple life, but then it could not have been long and complicated because it only lasted for eight years.

Petya's mother died when he was four, but he remembered her very well. He seemed to see her clearly before him: a skinny woman with pale, thin and tousled hair, who either fondled him and popped into his mouth anything there was to eat — an onion, a piece of pie, a bit of herring, a crust of bread, or else, suddenly and for no reason at all, flared out at him, shouting and hitting him blindly with anything that came to hand. Even so, Petya often thought of his mother.

One of the days he remembered was his mother's funeral.

It was a grim January morning; a fine, dry snow came sifting down from the lowering sky; chased by the gusts of wind, it made countless needle stabs at the face and hurried away in waves along the icy road. Walking behind the coffin between Granny and Varvara the laundress, Petya felt an unbearable pain in his frozen hands and toes, but even if it hadn't been for the pain he could hardly have kept pace with the two women. He was dressed in what happened to be available: the handed-down boots were so huge that his feet floated freely inside them; the old threadbare coat he had on must have belonged to a big man because the skirts had to be tucked in behind the belt, otherwise they'd drag along the ground; the hat, which the yardkeeper had been wheedled into lending him, kept slipping down Petya's forehead and blocking his view of the road ahead.

Walking back from the cemetery, Granny and Varvara talked and talked about Petya, wondering what was to be done about him. To whom should they appeal for help? And, what's more, who would do the running round, finding a home for the orphan?

Petya continued to live wherever he found shelter, now with one old granny, now with another. And there is no knowing how his life would have shaped if Varvara the laundress had not meddled in all kindness.

Varvara lived in a basement in Mokhovaya Street in the backyard of a large building. In the same house, only on a higher floor, lodged several people from the troupe of the local circus, occupying a number of rooms

that opened into a dark connecting passage. As Varvara always did the washing for these people, she knew them very well. Very often she took Petya along with her when delivering the laundry. The boy's sad story was known to all: everyone knew that he was an orphan without kith or kin. In conversation Varvara said time and again what a good thing it would be if one of these gentlemen would take pity on the orphan and apprentice him. However, all these people obviously had enough worries of their own, and no one offered to take Petya on. There was only one man among them who did not say yes or no, but who kept looking at the boy to take his measure. This man was Bekker, the acrobat.

One must suppose that all this time there had been some secret and more definite talks on the subject between Bekker and Varvara, because one day, making sure that all the other gentlemen had gone to rehearsal and only Bekker remained at home, Varvara quickly took Petya upstairs and straight into the acrobat's room.

Bekker really seemed to be expecting someone. He sat smoking his porcelain pipe with a curved stem and hung with little tassels. He had on a flat cap sewn with glass beads and worn at an angle. On the table before him stood three beer bottles — two of them empty, and the third just begun.

His beefy face was as red as his thick bull's neck. His self-confident look and bearing could leave no one in any doubt that even here, alone in his room, he never forgot how handsome he was.

"Here he is, Karl Bogdanovich, here's the boy," Varvara said, pushing Petya forward.

"Good," said the acrobat. "Only not like this. Undress the boy."

Until then Petya had been standing still, glancing timidly at Bekker, but at these words he shied and clutched at Varvara's skirt. And when Bekker repeated his order and Varvara, turning the boy round started undressing him, Petya grabbed at her with both hands and started screaming and struggling like a chicken with the cook's knife at its throat.

"What's the matter with you? Aren't you a silly, honestly! What scared you? Come on, take off your things, child, come on, it's nothing... Look at you, aren't you a silly!.." Varvara kept saying as she tried to ease Petya's clutching fingers open and at the same time undo the buttons on his pants.

Petya put up a desperate struggle. Frightened beyond reason, he

wriggled, writhed, thrashed, and screamed at the top of his voice. Finally, Bekker lost patience. He put his pipe down on the table, took a stride towards Petya and, taking no notice of his even more violently thrashing arms and legs, quickly gripped him with his arms. Before Petya knew what was happening, he felt tightly clutched between Bekker's fat knees. His shirt and pants were pulled off in an instant. Now, Bekker lifted him like a straw, placed him head down across his knees, and started feeling over the boy's chest and sides, pressing down with his thumbs in those places which he did not find immediately satisfactory, and giving Petya a slap when his wriggling interfered with his examination.

Varvara felt sorry for the child: Karl Bogdanovich really seemed to squeeze and squash him too hard, but, on the other hand, she was afraid to meddle, seeing that she herself had brought the boy, and Bekker had promised to take him on if he found him suitable. Standing in front of the boy, she hastily wiped his tears, telling him not to be afraid because Karl Bogdanovich wasn't going to do him any harm, and only wanted to take a look at him.

But it was more than she could stand when Karl Bogdanovich made the boy kneel down with his back to him and started pulling back his shoulders, again digging his thumbs in between his shoulder-blades; and when the child's skinny, naked chest suddenly thrust forward, with all the ribs showing, his head fell back, and he seemed to go numb from pain and terror, she rushed to the rescue. However, before she could tear him away, Bekker himself handed Petya over to her. The boy came to his senses at once, though he went on shivering and sobbing.

"Come, child, come. You see no harm has been done you!.. Karl Bogdanovich only wanted to take a look at you," she repeated over and over again, soothing the child as best she could.

She stole a look at Bekker: he gave her a nod, and poured himself a glass of beer.

Two days later, when Petya had to be handed over to Bekker for good and all, Varvara was obliged to use cunning because nothing else helped, neither reasoning nor fondling. She had bought Petya two new calico shirts with her own money, and also tried to coax him with the mint biscuits he loved, but still he refused to obey. The act of handing him over took place in Bekker's room, and so Petya was afraid to scream: he only pressed his tear-stained face hard to Varvara's skirt and desperately

clutched at her hands every time she made a move towards the door with the intention of leaving him alone with Karl Bogdanovich.

At last the scene got on Bekker's nerves. He grabbed Petya by the collar of his shirt, tore him away from Varvara's skirt, and the moment the door banged shut behind her set him right in front of himself and ordered him to look straight into his eyes.

Petya continued to shiver terribly; the features of his thin, sickly face seemed to shrink, giving him the look of a little old man, pitiful and frail.

Bekker took him by the chin, and repeated his order.

"Now listen, youngster," he said, shaking a finger before Petya's nose. "When you want to go there," he pointed at the door, "you'll get it here," he indicated the seat of the boy's pants. "And hard, very hard," he added, releasing Petya and finishing his beer.

A little later he took Petya to the circus. Everyone there was in a flurry of packing, for early next morning the troupe with all its belongings, people and horses, was to make the move to Riga for the summer season.

In that first moment, the novelty and variety of impressions frightened Petya, rather than roused his curiosity. He huddled in a corner and watched the men running past him, carrying things he had never seen before. Someone may have noticed the strange fair-haired boy, but no one could bother about him just then, and everyone rushed past.

During the ten days which it took the troupe to make the move to Riga, Petya was left to his own devices. The people who surrounded him in the trailer were not utter strangers any more; he had become used to many of them; many were jolly fellows, they joked, sang songs, and inspired no fear in him. There were even some like the clown Edvards who chucked him under the chin in passing; and once, one of the women even gave him a slice of orange. In short, little by little he became accustomed to his surroundings, and he would have been quite happy if someone else had taken him on, anyone but Karl Bogdanovich. He simply could not get used to him; in Bekker's presence, Petya fell silent at once, cringed miserably and tried hard not to cry.

Life became especially hard when his training began. After the first experiments Bekker saw that he had not been mistaken in the boy: Petya was light as a feather and had pliant joints; he lacked the muscular strength, of course, to manage these natural qualities, but this did not really matter, Bekker was certain that he would acquire the strength

through training. After a month of daily exercises, morning and evening, when he made Petya sit on the floor and touch his knees with his head, the boy was able to perform this without his teacher's help. It was incomparably harder for him to lean over backwards and touch his heels with the back of his head, but little by little he managed this too. He was also beginning to jump easily over a chair, but when Bekker demanded that he should land on his hands and not his feet, sticking his legs up in the air, Petya rarely succeeded; he jumped over the chair and landed on his face or head, risking to break his neck. However, failing to perform the trick or hurting himself made only half the trouble: the other, more painful half, was the beating he got from Bekker every time. The boy's muscles remained as weak as ever, and evidently they needed strengthening.

A hinged step-ladder was brought into the room occupied by Bekker, and a stick was laid across the rungs at a certain height from the floor. When Bekker gave the command, Petya had to take a running jump, grab hold of the middle of the stick, and remain suspended like that for five minutes, then for ten, doing this several times every day. Sometimes he simply had to hang thus, and sometimes he had to turn over on his back and pass his legs through between the stick and his head. The aim of this exercise was to train him to curl his toes round the stick, suddenly drop his arms and hang down just by his toes. The most difficult thing was to keep smiling while hanging head-down to produce a good impression on the spectators who should never suspect what a strain it was on his muscles, how his shoulder-joints ached, and how terrible was the convulsive constriction in his chest.

The child's heart-rending shrieks and his trainer's shouts that more often than not accompanied these lessons were so rousing that Bekker's comrades would rush into the room and tear the boy out of his hands. A quarrel would ensue, after which Petya sometimes had it even worse. There were times, however, when this interference ended more peaceably. This happened when it was the clown Edvards who came to the boy's rescue. Usually he settled the matter with beer and snack. In the friendly talk that followed Edvards always tried to persuade Bekker that his method was no good at all, that by intimidation and beatings one could not get anywhere even with dogs and monkeys to say nothing of children, that fear unquestionably inspired timidity, and timidity was the worst enemy of acrobatics as it deprived the acrobat of confidence and

flare, without which one could only strain a gut, break one's neck, or dislocate vertebrae.

And funny thing: every time Edvards, excited by the beer and the talk, started demonstrating there and then how a certain trick should be done, Petya performed the exercise much more willingly and agilely.

The boy was known well to the entire troupe now. Bekker had procured for him a clown's costume: he painted the boy's face white, daubed two red spots on his cheeks, and during the show brought him out to the arena. Sometimes, for a trial, Bekker would unexpectedly raise the boy by the legs and make him run a few steps on his hands. Petya had to strain all the strength he had in him, but very often his strength failed him and, after making a few steps on his hands, his shoulders suddenly gave way and he fell face down on the sand, which the spectators thought hilariously funny.

If his teacher had been Edvards, Petya would certainly have made better progress: in Bekker's hands his further development was obviously not fast enough. Petya was as afraid of him as he had been on that first day. His fear was now augmented by another feeling which he could not have put into words but which gradually grew in him, confusing his thoughts and emotions, and making him cry bitterly at night when, lying on his mattress, he listened to his master's snores.

And Bekker did nothing, nothing at all to endear himself to the boy. He never said a kind word to him even when Petya executed some trick well, and merely glanced down at him condescendingly from his huge height. Obviously it little worried Bekker that the two shirts given to Petya by Varvara had been worn into shreds, that he did not change his underclothes for two weeks sometimes, that he did not wash his neck and ears, or that his boots were gaping at the toes and he had to slosh in them through the mud and puddles in the street. Bekker's comrades, and Edvards more than the others, often rebuked him for this, but in response Bekker merely whistled impatiently and snapped his whip against his thighs.

He went on training Petya as before, punishing him every time something did not come out.

When the troupe had returned to St. Petersburg, Edvards gave Petya a pup. The boy's delight with it knew no bounds: he ran about the stables and corridors, showing the pup to everyone and kissing him on his pink, wet nose all the time.

Just then, Bekker was returning from the arena, annoyed because he had not been called out for an encore, and on seeing Petya carrying a puppy, he snatched it out of his arms, and sent it flying with a kick; the puppy hit its head against the wall, and fell down dead.

Sobbing, Petya rushed to Edvards who was just coming out of his dressing-room. Bekker, maddened by the cursing he heard round him, pushed Petya roughly away, took a swing and slapped Edvards on the face...

For all his lightness and pliancy, Petya was not so much an India rubber as a poor boy.

2

The children's rooms in the house of Count Listomirov faced south and opened into the garden. They were lovely rooms! When the sun was in the sky its rays shone into the windows from morning till evening. Only the lower half of the windows were shaded with blue taffeta curtains to protect the eyesight of the children from the unnecessary glare. For the same purpose the carpets in all the rooms were also blue, and the wallpaper not too light.

In one of the rooms, toys were stacked along the lower part of all the walls.

There were brightly coloured English books, beds with dolls in them, pictures, tiny chests of drawers, kitchens, porcelain tea-sets, lambs and dogs to be rolled along on spools. These things belonged to the girls. The boys' territory contained tables with tin soldiers set out on them, a papier-mâché troika of terribly pop-eyed greys hung with jingle bells and harnessed into a carriage; a large grey goat; a mounted Cossack; a drum and a brass trumpet whose sounds always plunged Miss Bleaks, the English governess, into despair. This room was called the playroom.

On Wednesday in Butter Week it was especially jolly in this playroom with the children shouting for joy, which was small wonder since they had just been told:

"Darling children, you have been good and sweet since the beginning of Butter Week; today is Wednesday; if you continue to behave yourselves you'll be taken to the circus on Friday night."

This was said by Aunt Sonya.

Before she had even finished speaking, the children started shouting, jumping, and showing their delight by other more or less expressive means. In this outburst of childish glee, it was Puff, the little boy of five, who surprised everyone. He was always so slow-moving, and here, evidently excited by what he had heard about the circus and was actually going to see there, he suddenly fell down on all fours, raised his left leg and started acting a clown, pushing out his tongue out of one corner of his mouth and glancing slyly at everyone with his narrow eyes.

"Pick him up, pick him up quickly, the blood will rush into his head!" cried Aunt Sonya.

There was more shouting, more hopping round Puff who refused to get up and kept raising one leg after the other.

"Children, children, enough! I'm afraid you don't want to be good any longer... You don't want to listen," said Aunt Sonya in distress, mainly annoyed with herself because she could never feel angry with the children.

She adored "her" children. And they really were very sweet, it must be said.

Vera, the eldest girl, was already eight, next came Zizi aged six; and then the boy who was five. His name was Paul, but he was given one nickname after another: Baby, Fatty, Toddler, Bun, and finally Puff, which stuck. He was a short, plump little boy with a fat, milk-white body, a ball-shaped head and a round face whose only distinctive feature were his little Kirghiz eyes which only opened wide when there was talk of food or food was actually served.

The promised outing to the circus put Vera on the alert and now she closely watched the behaviour of her younger sister and brother. When she noticed a quarrel starting, she ran to them quickly and, keeping a wary eye on the forbidding Miss Bleaks, hurriedly whispered something now to Zizi, now to Puff, kissing now one, now the other, and quickly made peace between them.

At long last, Friday came. When the grandfather clock in the dining-room struck twelve, one of the footmen opened wide the doors and the children, accompanied by Miss Bleaks and their Swiss governess entered the room. Lunch was, as usual, a very solemn affair.

Zizi and Puff, warned by Vera, never uttered a word. Vera watched them like a hawk, and controlled their every movement.

After lunch, Miss Bleaks felt it was her duty to report to the Countess

that the children had never been so well-behaved as during those last few days. The Countess replied that she had already heard this from her sister and so had given instructions that a box should be booked for them for that evening.

On hearing this, Vera, who had stifled her emotions for such a long time, lost control, ran to her mother and started hugging her so passionately that for a moment she quite covered the Countess's face with her fluffy hair.

Vera now went to the grand piano on which lay some circus programmes; placing her hand on one of them, she turned her blue eyes to her mother and, breathless with eagerness, asked in a sweetly pleading voice:

"Mummy, may I? May I take one of these?"

"You may, dear."

"Zizi, Puff, come here quickly!" Vera shouted in elation, flourishing the programme. "I'll tell you what we're going to see at the circus tonight! I'll tell you everything!.. Come, let's go to our rooms!.."

"Really, Vera dear..." the Countess said reproachfully in a faint voice, but Vera did not hear her, for she was already dashing to the playroom, with her brother and sister at her heels, and the puffing and blowing Miss Bleaks hurrying after them.

The general excitement mounted even higher in the brightly sunlit playroom.

Vera laid out the programme on the low table from which she had swept off the toys.

She demanded that everyone should come and sit round the table: Aunt Sonya, Miss Bleaks, their music teacher, and the wet-nurse who arrived with the baby in her arms. It was very much harder to get Zizi and Puff to settle down: jostling each other, they pushed up close to Vera, now from one side, now from the other, climbed on to the stools, sprawled over the little table and all but lay on the programme. But finally, with Aunt Sonya's help, Vera had them sitting down properly.

Vera tossed back her hair, bent over the programme, and read with especial feeling:

"'The India Rubber Boy. Acrobatic acts on the tip of a six-yard-long pole.' Auntie dearest, you tell us about this," she said to Aunt Sonya. "Do tell us! What kind of a boy is he? Is he real? A living boy? Why is he an 'India rubber boy'?"

"I suppose he is called that because he is very pliant... And then, you'll see it for yourselves..."

"No, no, you tell us now, tell us what he's going to do on the tip of that pole, high up in the air... How is he going to do those acts?"

"How is he going to do them?" Zizi joined in.

"How?" Puff echoed, opening his mouth wide.

"Children, you're asking me too many things... I can't explain everything, truly I can't. You'll see it all with your own eyes tonight. Vera dear, do continue. Well then, what comes next?"

Vera read on, but the response was not as eager as before: there was a noticeable slackening of interest, as it was now wholly centred on the India rubber boy; he became the object of their talk, surmises and even arguments.

Zizi and Puff did not even want to hear what else there was on the programme; they got down from their stools, and started playing noisily, acting the India rubber boy. Again Puff went down on all fours, raised his left leg like a clown, and, sticking his tongue out as far as it would go to touch his cheek, glanced at everyone with his narrow Kirghiz eyes, making Aunt Sonya gasp at his antics because the blood might rush to the dear boy's head.

Vera hurriedly read the rest of the programme and joined her brother and sister in their game.

There could not have been a happier, jollier playroom anywhere! The sun, now touching the roofs of the neighbouring buildings beyond the garden, shone on the group of playing children, lit up their happy, flushed faces, played on the brightly-coloured toys, strewn all over the room, slid over the soft carpet, and filled the room with a warm glow.

Throughout dinner, the children kept asking what time it was and what the weather was like. Aunt Sonya vainly tried her best to change the subject and subdue their excitement if only a little. After dinner, she came into the playroom and with a beaming face announced that the Count and Countess had said it was time to dress the children and take them to the circus.

Instantly, the now lamp-lit room was in a turmoil. Aunt Sonya even had to resort to threat: anyone who was naughty and refused to be properly muffled up would be left at home! The children were at last taken downstairs, looked over, muffled up more warmly, and let out of the front

door before which stood a large carriage, thickly sprinkled with snow.

When the party had been seated, the doors of the carriage were slammed shut, the driver smartly leapt into the box, and off they went.

3

The show had not yet begun when they arrived. The circus was packed with spectators, especially in the upper tiers. As usual, the elegant public was late. The band blared forth with all its trumpets blowing. The circular arena, flooded with light from the sides and from above and smoothly raked, was still empty.

Suddenly, the band changed to a faster rhythm. The drapes, curtaining the entrance, were pushed aside and in marched about twenty men dressed in red liveries trimmed with gold braid; all of them wore jack-boots, their hair was tightly curled and glossily pomaded.

A hubbub of approving voices ran up and down the tiers. The show was about to begin. The liveried men had barely fallen into line to each side of the entrance when with shrill squeals and laughter a whole crowd of clowns rushed in, tumbling, falling on their hands and leaping up into the air.

A clown with butterflies on the front and back of his coat headed this noisy crowd. The spectators instantly recognised Edvards, their favourite, and shouts were heard from everywhere:

"Bravo, Edvards! Bravo! Bravo!"

This time, however, Edvards disappointed his public. He did not perform anything outstandingly funny: he turned one or two somersaults, walked round the arena balancing a peacock feather on his nose, and vanished. And he did not reappear, in spite of the clapping and calls.

A fat white horse was now led out, and Amalia, a girl of fifteen, appeared and gracefully curtsied to right and left.

After Amalia came a juggler, then a clown with some clever dogs, then there were tight-rope dancers, then a horse doing haute école. Next, a rider galloped round the ring on an unsaddled horse, then on two saddled horses — in short, the show went on its course, and then came the intermission.

"Auntie dearest, we'll see the India rubber boy now, won't we?" asked Vera.

"Yes, the programme does say that he's in the second act... Well, are you enjoying yourselves, darlings?"

"Oh yes, yes, we're enjoying ourselves very much!" Vera replied in obvious delight.

"And you, Zizi? Are you happy, Puff?"

"Will there be shooting?" asked Zizi.

"Don't be silly, I told you there won't be."

There was no getting a word out of Puff: the moment the intermission began his entire attention became absorbed by the sight of the sweets and apples loaded on trays which were being peddled up and down the rows.

The band again began to play, and again the red liveried attendants appeared and fell into line. The second part of the show began.

"Isn't the India rubber boy ever coming?" the children asked after every number.

"Here he comes now..."

The curtain was pushed aside to the sounds of a merry waltz, and there was Bekker, the big and tall acrobat, holding a skinny, flaxen-haired boy by the hand. They both wore flesh-coloured tights covered with spangles. Two attendants brought a long gilded pole with an iron cross-piece on one end.

Bekker and the boy came to the centre of the arena, bowed all round, and then Bekker placed his right hand against the boy's back and turned him over in the air three times. But this was only the prelude. After bowing all round again, Bekker picked up the pole, set its thick end against the golden belt girding his stomach, and started to raise the other end with the iron cross-piece which barely glittered high up. Having thus set the pole in equilibrium, Bekker whispered something to the boy who quickly climbed on to his shoulders, then gripped the pole with his thin arms and legs, and started slowly pulling himself up. His every movement made the pole waver and was passed on to Bekker who balanced the pole, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

Shouts of "bravo" rang out when the boy reached the top of the pole and from there blew a kiss. Silence fell again, and only the band continued playing the merry waltz. Gripping the cross-piece with his hands, the boy raised himself straight up on his arms and very, very slowly started bending over backwards to pass his legs through between his head and the cross-piece; for a minite, all that could be seen of him was his flaxen hair and his strenuously breathing chest, covered with spangles. The

pole was wavering, and everyone could see what a strain it was on Bekker to keep it in equilibrium.

"Bravo! Bravo!" people shouted again.

"Enough! Enough!" sounded from here and there.

When the boy was seen sitting on the iron cross-piece again and blowing kisses from there, the entire audience burst out shouting and clapping. Bekker, who never took his eyes off the boy, whispered something to him. The boy started another act at once. Holding on to the cross-piece with his hands, he lowered his legs slowly and lay down on his back across the cross-piece. Now he had to do the most difficult thing of all: he had to lie down on his back in such a way that his legs would be perfectly balanced with his head, and then suddenly slide off the cross-piece and hang suspended in the air by his knees alone.

Everything was going well. The pole, it is true, was wavering badly, but the boy had already done half the act; he was bending back lower and lower, he was already beginning to slide off the cross-piece.

"Enough! Enough!" shouted several frightened voices.

The boy went on sliding head-down off the cross-piece...

Suddenly something glittered and whirled in the air, then fell with a thud on the arena.

Everything came into motion at once: people jumped up from their seats, shouts and women's screams rang out, voices were heard irritably asking if there was a doctor among the spectators. In the meantime, circus attendants and clowns could be seen leaping over the barrier on to the arena and thronging round Bekker. Several men picked up something and, bending low, quickly carried it away through the curtained door. Only the gilded pole with the iron cross-piece at one end remained on the scene. The band had stopped playing for a minute, and now, at a sign from the director, it blared forth once more. Several clowns, squealing and tumbling, dashed out, but no one took any notice of them. The public was flocking to the exit.

In spite of the general confusion, many people noticed the pretty fair-haired girl in a blue hat and short cape who, clutching her arms round the neck of a lady in black, was sobbing and screaming at the top of her voice:

"Oh, the poor boy! The poor boy!.."

On the playbill, posted up the next morning, there was no mention of the India rubber boy. He was never mentioned on any playbill again, and he could not have been, because he no longer existed.

Konstantin Stanyukovich

MAXIMKA

Translated by *Bernard Isaacs*

The scene of "Maximka" by Konstantin Stanyukovich (1843-1903) is set on board a clipper in the midst of the tropical ocean. His earlier books, *Sea Stories* and *Round the World on the* Hawk, were very popular with young readers.

When Konstantin was eleven his father, an admiral, placed him in the naval military school in St. Petersburg. At seventeen, he went on a round-the-world voyage on the corvette *Kalevala* which lasted for three years. Stanyukovich resigned from the navy when he was twenty-two, and for about a year worked as a village schoolteacher. After this he took up journalism. He was arrested for his connection with revolutionaries and exiled to Siberia, where he began to write the sea stories which brought him country-wide fame.

His childhood impressions when, as the son of the military governor of Sevastopol, the sea fortress, he often witnessed the bravery, fortitude and humaneness of Russian soldiers and sailors, left an indelible imprint on everything he wrote. At the same time he saw how utterly the men were deprived of rights and how humiliating it was for them to be completely at the mercy of their commanding officers. In his stories Stanyukovich expressed his passionate hatred of serfdom which was only abolished in 1861 when he was a youth of eighteen. But most important of all, he showed the humaneness and decency of Russian sailors, their comradeship, their love for children, and their readiness to come to the aid of anyone who needed help, irrespective of their colour and nationality.

I

The ship's bell had just struck. It was six o'clock of a magnificent tropical morning in mid Atlantic. The sun, a dazzling, burning ball of gold, was quickly climbing the light-blue eastern sky, whose soaring loftiness and soft transparency were flecked here and there, as with scraps of delicate lace, by tiny snow-white wisps of clouds. It suffused the vast expanse of the ocean with radiant lustre. The sea stretched one endless, gently undulating plain from one distant blue horizon to the other.

There was a sort of solemn stillness in the air.

The only sound was that of the enormous light-blue waves racing after each other with silver crests glittering in the sunlight, and merging together with a gentle, almost caressing murmur, as if whispering to you that, out there in the tropics, the ancient primeval ocean is always in the best of moods.

Carefully, like a tender, loving nurse, does it bear the sailing ships upon its gigantic bosom, with never a threat of storm or hurricane to sailor.

The ocean was deserted.

There was not a single sail to be seen anywhere, not a single puff of smoke. Nothing but the broad ocean highway.

Now and again the bright silvery scales of a fly-fish would glitter in the sunshine; or a playful whale would show its dark back and noisily send up a fountain of water; or a black frigate-bird or snow-white albatross would soar overhead; or a little grey petrel would speed past over the water, bound for the distant shores of Africa or America. Then again the sea would be deserted. Nothing but the murmuring waves, the sun, and sky — all bright, cheerful and kindly.

Rocking lightly on the ocean's swell, a Russian steam-driven warship, the clipper *Zabiyaka*, was swiftly heading south, each day carrying her still further from the North, a land grim and sombre, yet so dear and beloved.

A small, black, trim-looking vessel with a flowing grace of line, her three tall raking masts clothed in canvas, the *Zabiyaka*, listing slightly to leeward, was sailing at seven or eight knots, borne along by a steady, favourable north-east trade wind. She rode the waves lightly and grace-

fully, cleaving the sea with her prow amid swirls of tumbling foam and flying glittering spray. The waves softly licked her sides, and in her wake lay a broad ribbon of sparkling silver.

Above and below decks the usual 8 a. m. cleaning and scouring were in progress in preparation for hoisting the ship's flag and starting the day on board.

Scattered about the deck in white work shirts with wide blue collars revealing muscular, weather-tanned necks, their feet bare and trousers tucked up above the knees, the sailors were busy washing down, scrubbing and scouring the decks, the sides of the ship, the guns, the brass-work and everything else on the *Zabiyaka* that required such attention. They worked with the meticulous care sailors always show when they are cleaning their ship, seeing to it that everything, from the trucks down to the holds, shall be spotlessly clean and that everything that can respond to brick, cloth and whiting shall be spick and span.

The sailors were working with a hearty good will, chuckling each time they heard the "bawling" bo'sun, Matveyich — a typical old sea-dog with popping grey eyes and a face red from sunburn and drinking bouts ashore — improvise a particularly talented piece of invective that struck even the accustomed ears of a Russian sailor. Matveyich did this not so much to spur the men on as to stick to form.

No one minded Matveyich's cursing. The men knew him to be a kind and decent man who always dealt fair with them and never abused his position. And they had long grown accustomed to his not being able to speak three words without swearing. Indeed, they were often delighted by the range and variety of his vocabulary in this respect. He was a real artist at it.

Now and again a sailor would run down to the forecastle where the water-tub and the smore-lamp stood to get a quick smoke of acrid *makhorka* and exchange a few words with his friends. Then he would return to his task of scrubbing and scouring, making a special effort each time he caught sight of the tall, lean figure of the chief officer, who had been nosing about in every corner of the ship since early morning.

The officer of the watch, a fair-haired young man, whose watch was from four till eight, had long since thrown off the drowsiness of his first half-hour. Clad in white, his shirt open at the neck, he paced up and down the bridge, breathing in great gulps of the cool, fresh morning air

which the burning sun had not yet heated. A balmy breeze pleasantly caressed the nape of his neck each time he stopped to look at the compass to see whether the helmsman was steering the right course, whether the sails were properly set or whether there were any squall clouds in the sky.

But all was well, and the officer of the watch had practically nothing to do in these blessed tropics.

And he continued his pacing of the bridge, dreaming prematurely of the end of his watch when he would be able to drink a cup of tea with those fresh warm rolls which the officers' cook was such an expert at making, providing that the vodka he got for "raising the dough" was not used by him internally.

II

All of a sudden the morning stillness was broken by the startled, unnaturally loud cry of the look-out man in the bows:

"Man in the sea!"

The sailors dropped their work, rushed to the forecastle and gazed anxiously out into the ocean.

"Where is he?" they shouted to the look-out man, a young fair-haired sailor whose face had gone as white as a sheet.

"Over there!" he said, pointing with a shaking hand. "I can't see him now. But I saw him a minute ago, boys! Hanging on to a mast, he was. Looked as if he was tied to it," he went on excitedly, as he vainly tried to catch sight of the mast again.

The officer of the watch, startled by the look-out man's cry, jammed his binoculars to his eyes and gazed out in the direction in which he had pointed. And the signaller, with his spyglass, did the same.

"Can you see anything?" asked the young officer.

"Yes, sir. Just a bit more to the left, sir."

But just then the officer, too, caught sight of the piece of mast bobbing up and down amid the waves, with a human figure upon it.

And in a shrill, quivering voice he shouted with all the force his healthy lungs could command:

"All hands on deck! In fore and main courses! Man the boat!"

And turning to the signal-man, he added excitedly:

"Keep your eyes on him!"

The boatswain piped the men up and bellowed: "Clear lower deck!"

The men rushed to their stations like mad.

The captain and the chief officer were already on the bridge. The other officers, most of them only half-awake, hurried up to the deck, putting on their uniforms as they came.

The chief officer took command — as is the rule when "All hands on deck" is piped — and the sailors jumped to his sharp orders with feverish haste, realising that every second was precious.

In less than seven minutes practically all the sails were furled and the *Zabiyaka* hove to, lightly rocking on the waves, and the longboat with sixteen oarsmen and an officer at the helm had been lowered.

"God speed!" the captain called from the bridge as the boat drew away from the ship.

The sailors rowed for all they were worth, hurrying to the castaway's rescue.

But in the seven minutes it had taken to bring the *Zabiyaka* to, she had travelled more than a mile, and mast and man could no longer be seen even through the glasses.

They had, however, noticed the direction in which the mast was floating by the compass, and in this direction they now rowed.

The eyes of all the crew of the *Zabiyaka* followed the boat, which, now rising on the crests of the waves, now sinking into the troughs between them, seemed no bigger than a nutshell.

Before long it was but a black speck.

III

On the deck silence reigned.

Now and again the sailors huddled together in the forecastle and on the quarter-deck would exchange a few words in low voices:

"Must be some sailor off a wrecked ship."

"No ship can get wrecked in these waters. Not unless she was pretty rotten one, she wouldn't!"

"No. But maybe she ran foul of another ship at night."

"Or caught fire, maybe."

"And this is the only man left alive!"

"Maybe the others got away in the boats and this fellow got left behind."

"I wonder whether he's alive?"

"Well, the water's warm here — he might be."

"How is it the sharks didn't get him? These waters are full of 'em."

"Yes, boys — a seaman's life is pretty dangerous, I see," said one of the sailors, suppressing a sigh. He was a young fellow with black hair and an earring in one ear, who had only joined the navy that year and had come to the high seas straight from the plough, so to speak.

And, a sad look on his face, he took off his cap and slowly crossed himself, as if silently praying God to preserve him from a horrible death at sea.

Three-quarters of an hour of agonising suspense followed.

Then at last the signal-man who had kept his eye glued to the spyglass, called out joyfully:

"The boat's coming back!"

When the boat drew nearer, the chief officer called to him:

"Have they got him?"

"I can't see him, sir," said the signal-man in a voice not quite so cheerful as before.

"I'm afraid they haven't found him," said the chief officer, going up to the captain.

The captain of the *Zabiyaka*, a short, thick-set, sturdy man of middle age with a thick growth of greyish-black hair on his fleshy cheeks and chin, and little round eyes, keen and sharp as a hawk's, shrugged his shoulders impatiently and said with barely concealed irritation:

"I think you're wrong. There is an experienced officer in the boat and he wouldn't have come back so soon if he hadn't found the man."

"But the signal-man can't see him in the boat."

"Maybe he's lying on the bottom. But in any case we'll soon know."

The captain started pacing the bridge, stopping every now and then to glance at the returning boat. Finally he took a look through the binoculars, and although he could not see the rescued man anywhere, the calmly cheerful expression on the coxswain's face made him feel pretty sure that they had him aboard.

And a pleased smile lit up the captain's stern face.

A few more minutes passed, and then the boat drew alongside and was hoisted on board with its crew.

The officer stepped out, followed by the oarsmen, all red-faced and sweaty and panting with exhaustion. One of the sailors supported the prize of their quest – a little Negro boy, about ten or eleven years old, drenching wet, his little emaciated, glossy body partially covered by a tattered shirt.

The little boy could hardly stand. He was trembling all over and looked up at the sailors with an expression in his big, sunken eyes in which joy seemed mingled with incredulity — as if he could scarcely believe that he had really been rescued.

"The poor kid was half-dead when we took him off. We had a job to bring him round," the coxswain told the captain.

"Take him to the sick-bay at once!" ordered the captain.

The boy was promptly carried off to the sick-bay where they rubbed him dry and put him in a bunk and covered him with warm blankets. After that the ship's surgeon started work on him by pouring brandy down his throat, a few drops at a time.

The boy swallowed the brandy thirstily and gazing up at the doctor with imploring eyes, pointed to his mouth.

Meanwhile up on deck the sails had been set again and in no more than five minutes the *Zabiyaka* was continuing on her way and the sailors were resuming their interrupted tasks.

On all sides animated voices discussed the rescue and commented on the little boy's terribly thin, emaciated appearance.

Some of the men ran down to the sick-bay to ask how he was.

"The doctor's attending to him. He'll bring him round all right!"

An hour later topman Korshunov brought the news that the little Negro boy had fallen asleep after having eaten a few spoonfuls of hot soup.

"The cook made it specially for him, boys. A clear soup – a kind of broth, it was," Korshunov told them excitedly, doubly delighted to have a credulous audience for once (he was a notorious liar) and to have something to tell that he didn't *need* to lie about.

And as if seeking to make the most of such a unique opportunity, he hurried on:

"The surgeon's assistant told me that the kid was jabbering something when the doctor was feeding him. Asking for more of that soup, he was.

And he tried to snatch the cup out of the doctor's hand. But the doctor wouldn't give him any more. 'He's got to go slow,' he said, 'otherwise it would kill him.'"

"What did the boy do then?"

"Nothing; he just had to put up with it."

Just then the captain's servant, Soikin, came up to where the sailors were sitting round the water-tub to smoke the stump of the captain's cigar.

Immediately all attention was transferred to him:

"You haven't heard what they're going to do with the Negro kid, Soikin, have you?"

Red-haired and freckled and dressed smartly in a fine sailor's shirt of his own and canvas shoes, Soikin puffed at his cigar in dignified fashion and replied in the authoritative tone of one who possesses first-hand information:

"What are we going to do with him? Why, put him ashore at the Cape, of course, when we get there."

And after a short pause, he added scornfully:

"What else could we do with a black heathen like that? Ruddy savages — that's all they are."

"Savages or not, they're God's children same as you and me," said old Zakharych, the ship's carpenter.

His words brought a chorus of approval from the group of smokers.

"But how's the kid going to get home from the Cape? I dare say he's got a father and mother somewhere, same as everyone else."

"Oh, there are lots of niggers at the Cape. They'll find out where he comes from," said Soikin, and, finishing the cigar stump, he went away.

"Who's *he* to give himself such airs? The damned flunkey!" the old carpenter growled.

IV

Next day, though still very weak, the little Negro boy had so far recovered from the shock of his experience that the fat, good-natured surgeon, smiling his huge smile, patted him on the cheek and allowed him a whole cup of broth. The boy gulped the hot liquid down and then stared up at

him with a look of touching gratitude in his big, protuberant eyes, whose black pupils stood out sharply against the whites.

After this, the surgeon tried to find out how the boy had come to be in the sea and how long he had gone without food. But despite his elaborate efforts to express himself by signs and gestures, all attempts at conversation with his patient were a failure. Although the little boy evidently knew more English than the surgeon, they both murdered the few score words they had at their disposal so as to make them quite incomprehensible.

Consequently neither could understand the other.

Then the doctor sent his assistant for one of the midshipmen, a young man whom all the officers called Petya.

"You can speak good English, Petya — see if you can talk to him. I don't seem to be getting anywhere," he said, laughing. "Tell him I'll let him get up in two or three days," he added.

The young midshipman sat down beside the boy's bunk and began asking him questions in English, taking care to use short phrases and pronounce each word distinctly; and the boy, if he did not understand all he said, at any rate understood a good deal of it, for he hastened to reply, stringing all sorts of words together and elaborating his meaning by means of expressive gestures.

After a rather long and difficult conversation in this strain, the midshipman gave the wardroom a rough, but fairly accurate outline of the boy's story based on his answers and gestures.

The boy had been on board an American brig, the *Betsy*, and belonged to the captain ("a big brute," the midshipman threw in) for whom he did the washing, cleaned his shoes and served him coffee-and-brandy (or rather, brandy-and-coffee). The captain called him "Boy" and the little Negro was convinced that that was his name. He had no idea who his father and mother were. The captain had bought him at the slave market at Mozambique about a year before and used to beat him every day. The *Betsy* had been on her way from Senegal to Rio, carrying a cargo of Negro slaves. Two days ago she had collided with another vessel (this part of the midshipman's story was based on the fact that the little boy had said, "Bang! Bang! Bang!" and thumped his fist against the bulkhead) and sunk. The boy had found himself in the sea, clung on to a piece of floating mast and spent the better part of two days on it.

But far more eloquent than any words, had he been able to say them, were the surprise the boy showed at being kindly treated, his frightened look, the grateful outcast-dog expression in his eyes as he gazed at the surgeon and the midshipman, and, above all, his shiny black back, which was covered with ugly weals and was so thin and emaciated that the ribs stuck out sharply.

The midshipman's story and the doctor's testimony made a big impression on the wardroom. One of the officers proposed that the boy be placed under the protection of the Russian Consul at Cape Town and a collection made for him amongst themselves. But that was nothing to the impression the story made on the ratings, when the midshipman's young servant, Artemy Mukhin (or Artyushka as they all called him) related it that evening to the forecastle, unable to deny himself a certain malicious pleasure in embellishing it with a few additions of his own illustrative of the utter devilishness of the American captain.

"Every blessed day he used to torment the kid. The slightest little thing — and he would hit him in the face till he bled. And then he would take his strap down from a hook — a horrible big strap made of the thickest leather — and flog him with that," he continued, carried away by the desire to paint the little boy's sufferings in the most lurid colours. "It made no difference to him, the swine, that it was just a poor, helpless kid, even if he was a blackie. The poor kid's back is a mass of weals even now. It's a horrible sight, the doctor says," continued the impressionable and excitable Artyushka.

But the sailors, who had been serfs themselves and had, not so long ago, personal acquaintanceship with floggings and thrashings, did not need Artyushka's embellishments to feel deeply stirred by the boy's story and they all wished that fiend of an American captain the most horrible of fates — if the sharks had not already eaten him, that is.

"Our peasants have already been freed, but it looks like they still have serfs in America?" one of the older sailors said.

"Yes, they have."

"I can't make it out. And they call themselves a free people!"

"For them the Negroes are sort of serfs," explained Artyushka, who had picked up scraps of information on the subject in the wardroom. "And that's why they're fighting between themselves. Some of the Americans want to free the Negroes and the others, those that have serfs, won't agree

to it. So they're all cutting each other's throats about it. But it's the ones that want to free the Negroes who'll win the war, the officers say. And they'll blow all the American serf-owners to blazes," he added, not without relish.

"God will be on their side, I dare say. A Negro wants his freedom just the same as another. Even a bird's unhappy in a cage, and it's the same with a human being," said Zakharych the carpenter.

The young, dark-complexioned, first-year sailor who had made the remark about life at sea being a dangerous one, had been listening attentively to this conversation and now asked:

"So this Negro we've picked up will be free now, will he?"

"But, of course. What d'you think?" said Artyushka confidently, though in his heart (not having any knowledge of American laws about property rights) he wasn't absolutely sure.

But according to his own reasoning the boy would be free. That fiend of a captain had gone to feed the fishes, so what more was there to fear?

And he went on:

"All he needs now is to get a new passport when we get to the Cape. And then he can go wherever he likes."

This bringing in of the passport idea effectively dispelled his own doubts.

"That's right!" the young sailor said eagerly.

And his good-natured, ruddy face with its affectionate "puppy" eyes was lit up by a happy smile of relief on the poor little boy's account.

The short twilight was succeeded by a tropical night of entrancing loveliness. The sky's velvety ceiling became studded with millions of glittering stars. The ocean darkened save where the water sparkled here and there, close to the clipper, with a phosphorescent light.

Soon "Prayers" was piped, and after that the watch off duty brought their bed things up on deck and went to sleep.

The watchmen sat among the tackle and shortened the long hours of their vigil by chatting quietly. That night the "Negro kid" was the subject of conversation in many groups.

V

Two days later, having paid his usual 7 a. m. visit to the sick-bay and examined his only patient, the doctor decided that he was now sufficiently recovered to go up on deck and have his meals with the sailors. He informed the boy of this mainly by signs, and this time the little Negro, who had now fully recovered and was as cheerful as could be and seemed already to have forgotten his recent narrow escape from death, quickly grasped his meaning. He jumped out of bed and was about to run up on deck to sit in the sun dressed just as he was. But the sight of his little black body draped in the long sailor's shirt which fitted it like a loose sack, sent the doctor into peals of laughter, while his assistant stood by giggling. The boy stopped, puzzled, wondering why the doctor was tugging at his shirt and laughing so heartily.

So he slipped out of the shirt and was about to dive through the sick-bay door naked; but the assistant held him back and the doctor, still laughing, said:

"No, no..."

And he made signs to the boy to put the shirt on again.

"What are we going to clothe him in, Filippov?" said the doctor perplexedly to his assistant, a curly-haired dandyish man of about thirty. "We never thought about that, did we?"

"No, sir. But if we were to cut the shirt off at the knees now and put a belt round his waist it would look quite respective," said the feldsher. He had an unfortunate habit of using wrong words when he wanted to make his speech more ornamental, more "eddicated", as the sailors said.

"What do you mean: 'respective'?" asked the doctor, smiling.

"Just respective, sir. Everybody knows what respective is, sir," said Filippov in an injured tone. "Neat and comfortable."

"I'm not so sure it would be 'respective', as you say. He'd be nothing but a laughing-stock. But all the same we've got to find him something to wear for the time being till I can get the captain's permission to have something made to measure for him."

"It ought to be quite easy to get a proper suit made for him. We've some tailors among the crew. They'll make one for him."

"All right. In the meantime go and make your 'respective' suit for him."

Just at that moment, however, there was a light, respectful knock at the door.

"Who is there?" shouted the doctor. "Come in!"

A reddish, plain, swollen-looking face with a pair of light brown side-whiskers, a suspiciously purple nose and bloodshot but lively and kindly eyes appeared in the doorway, followed a second later by the remainder of the small, spare, yet muscular and well-knit figure of foretop-man Ivan Luchkin.

He was a man of about forty, who had served in the navy for fifteen years and who was one of the best sailors aboard the ship and also one of the worst drunkards when ashore. For the sake of drink he had been known to sell the very clothes he stood up in and return to the clipper in his underlinen, awaiting the inevitable flogging the following morning with the utmost sang froid.

"It's me, sir," said Luchkin in a hoarse voice shuffling his bare, sinewy feet, one rough tar-stained hand nervously fingering the seam of his trousers.

In the other hand he was carrying a small bundle.

He looked at the doctor with that shamefaced, guilty expression in his face and eyes which one often sees in those of drunkards and other men addicted to some vice or other.

"What is it, Luchkin? Are you ill?"

"No, sir. I've brought some clothes here for the Negro boy. Seeing that he hadn't any, I thought I'd make him some, so I took his measurements and made him these. May I give them to him, sir?"

"Certainly, my dear chap. You've saved the situation," said the doctor, not a little astonished. "We were just wondering how we were going to dress the boy, but you thought of it before us."

"I did it in my spare time, sir," said the other, almost apologetically.

And with these words he opened the bundle and pulled out a little sailor's suit made of canvas. He shook it, and handing it to the astonished boy, said to him in a cheerful tone of voice, quite different from the shamefaced tone in which he spoke to the doctor, and looking affectionately at him:

"Here you are, Maximka. It's a real 'very good' uniform. Come on, put it on and let's see how it fits you."

"Why do you call him Maximka?" said the doctor, smiling.

"Why, sir, it was on Saint Maxim's day that we rescued him, so he must be Maximka. Besides he hasn't any other name, and we must call him something."

The little Negro was absolutely delighted when he put on the clean new sailor's suit. Evidently he had never had clothes like these to wear before.

Luchkin surveyed his handiwork from all angles, pulled the shirt in a bit here and smoothed it out a bit there and decided that the suit was an excellent fit.

"Well, now you're coming up on deck to sit in the sunshine, Maximka. May I take him up, sir?"

The doctor, a genial smile on his face, nodded his consent, and Luchkin took the boy's hand and leading him to the forecastle presented him to the other sailors.

"This is Maximka," he said. "He's going to forget all about that brute of an American now. He knows that Russian sailors won't be unkind to him."

And patting the little boy affectionately on the back, he pointed to his curly hair and said:

"We'll make a cap for you, too, old chap, and a pair of shoes as well. All in good time."

The boy couldn't understand a word, but the friendly smiles on the sailors' weather-beaten faces promised him that they wouldn't be unkind to him. And he smiled back at them, revealing dazzling white teeth, while he basked in the hot rays of his native southern sun.

And henceforward Maximka became his name.

VI

Having presented the boy, dressed in his new sailor's suit, to his shipmates, Ivan Luchkin announced that he was going to "look after" Maximka, to take him under his special protection. This he claimed as his right by virtue of having "fitted the boy out" and given him a name.

Of how this skinny, underfed little Negro, who had suffered so much at the hands of the American captain right at the dawn of his life, aroused unusual sympathy in his lonely heart (his own life, in youth especially, had not been one of the sweetest) and made him want to help make his

days on the ship as happy as possible — of that Luchkin never said a word. Like most simple Russians he was shy of showing his feelings before other people; and it was probably for this reason that he explained his desire to "look after" the boy by saying that he was "a funny little monkey". Nevertheless he sternly declared — casting a significant look at a sailor named Petrov, who was a notorious bully and loved teasing timid "first-year" sailors — that if anyone should be such a scoundrel as to ill-treat the little "orphan", then they'd have him, Ivan Luchkin, to deal with.

"Make no mistake: I'll bash his rotten face in," he added, as if to make quite clear what "to deal with him" signified. "Cruelty to children's the wickedest sin there is. Black 'uns or white 'uns, it's all the same. A child's a child. So be kind to him," he concluded.

The other sailors readily assented to Luchkin's self-assumed guardianship of Maximka, though many of them were not a little sceptical as to whether he would be able to cope with the difficult job he had undertaken.

How could a hardened old "boozer" and debauchee like him look after the boy?

And one of the older sailors asked, a touch of irony in his voice:

"So you're going to be a sort of nanny to the boy, are you?"

"That's right: a nanny!" Luchkin replied, smiling amiably and ignoring the men's jeering remarks and grins. "Why, do you think I'm not good enough for such a job? It's not as though he was a nobleman's son! And the kid will need some clothes. I'll have to make him another suit and some shoes and a cap. The doctor's going to try and get him some slops from the store. Let Maximka think well of us Russian sailors when we have to leave him all alone at the Cape. At any rate he won't have to go about naked."

"But how are you going to talk to the boy, Luchkin? He won't understand you and you won't understand him!"

"Oh, we'll manage all right," said Luchkin, with unaccountable conviction. "He's a bright kid, even if he *is* a blackie. I'll soon teach him our lingo. He'll understand me all right."

And he glanced affectionately at the little boy, who was squatting against the side of the ship and gazing round with curiosity.

Meeting his warm glance, the boy smiled back — a broad, grateful smile

which showed that he understood without words that Luchkin was his friend.

At eleven-thirty all the morning's work was done and the vodka was handed out. The two boatswains and the eight petty officers formed a circle in the middle of the quarter-deck and piped the vodka distribution signal (the sailors facetiously called it "the song of the nightingale"). Luchkin, pointing to his mouth and smiling happily, told Maximka to sit down and wait till he came back, then hurried off to the quarter-deck, leaving the little boy somewhat puzzled.

But he did not remain in this state for long.

The sharp smell of vodka which quickly spread about the deck, and the grave, satisfied mien of the sailors as they came back from the quarter-deck, wiping their moustaches with their rough, tar-stained hands, recalled to him how on the *Betsy* the men had been given a weekly tot of rum and how the captain of the *Betsy* himself had drunk it every day — and more of it than was good for him, it had seemed to the boy.

Returning to Maximka in the gayest of spirits after his big glass of vodka, Luchkin patted the boy cheerfully on the back and, evidently anxious to share his pleasant impressions with him, said:

"*Bon* vodka! Very good *schnaps* that, Maximka!"

Maximka nodded sympathetically and repeated after him:

"Very goot!"

Such rapid understanding delighted Luchkin.

"Bravo, Maximka!" he exclaimed. "You understand everything! But now we must go and have our dinner. Aren't you hungry?"

And he moved his jaws up and down expressively to indicate his meaning.

And it was not difficult to understand what he meant — particularly since the boy could see some of the sailors carrying big wooden mess bowls on to the deck, out of which came an appetising smell of cabbage soup.

So he nodded his head eloquently and his eyes sparkled with joy.

"Why, he understands everything!" said Luchkin, who was already taking something of a pride in the boy and his own ability to make himself understood by him. And taking his hand he led him off aft to have dinner.

On the deck, which was covered with tarpaulins, the men, their legs tucked under them, were sitting around in groups of twelve or so before steaming bowls of *shchi* (made out of sauerkraut laid up in Kronstadt),

eating in silence with an air of intense concentration, the way common people usually do, and taking bites of soaked biscuit.

Stepping carefully between the eaters, Luchkin made his way with Maximka to his own mess whose station was between the mainmast and the foremast, and said to the sailors who were waiting for him before beginning:

"Well, boys, are we going to let Maximka join our mess?"

"What a question! Sit down, both of you," said Zakharych, the old ship's carpenter.

"But maybe some of the others object. What do you say, boys?" Luchkin asked again.

All to a man expressed their approval of the boy's joining their mess and moved aside to give them space.

And on all sides laughing voices exclaimed:

"Don't worry—he won't eat everything up!"

"There's enough pork to go round—even for him!"

"We've even got a spoon ready for the kid."

"I only asked because he's a Negro, you know, a heathen," said Luchkin, sitting down on the deck and making Maximka do the same. "But I reckon that in God's eyes all men are equal. Everyone wants his bite to eat..."

"To be sure! The Lord loves all his children alike. He's no respecter of persons, not him. 'Tis only that fool Soikin who babbles about heathens!" said Zakharych.

All the other sailors evidently shared Zakharych's opinion. That was not surprising, considering the fine tolerance with which Russian sailors have always treated people of all races and creeds they had ever met with.

The mess received Maximka with the greatest cordiality. One sailor gave him a wooden spoon, another a soaked biscuit, and all cast friendly reassuring glances at the little boy, who was evidently not used to such kind treatment from men of white skin.

"Well, let's begin. Or the *shchi* will get cold," said Zakharych.

The sailors crossed themselves and began their meal.

"Why don't you start, Maximka?" said Luchkin, pointing to the boy's spoon. "It's *shchi*—very nice. Good soup," he added.

But the little Negro, who had not been allowed to eat with the white men aboard the *Betsy* and had had to eat the few leavings they gave him in

some dark corner by himself, was afraid to help himself, though his little eyes gazed hungrily at the food and his mouth watered.

"The poor kid is scared. That swine of a captain must have frightened him out of his wits," said Zakharych, who sat next to the boy.

And so saying, he stroked Maximka's curly hair and put his own spoon to the boy's lips.

After this Maximka lost his fears; and a few minutes later he was putting away a hearty meal of *shchi* and meat and millet porridge with butter.

And every now and then Luchkin commended him, saying:

"That's right, Maximka. Very good, brother. Eat and good health to you!"

VII

The ship resounded with the snores of the sailors taking their after-dinner nap. The only ones who weren't asleep were the members of the watch and one or two handy sailors who were taking advantage of the free time to sew a pair of boots or a new shirt or to mend some article of clothing.

And the *Zabiyaka* sailed smoothly on, borne along by a steady trade wind. The watch had practically nothing to do except on those rare occasions when a storm-cloud crept up and all sails had to be taken in to meet the oncoming squall and its torrents of rain with stripped masts, that is to say: with the least possible area of resistance.

But the horizon was quite clear this day, with nowhere a sign of that tiny patch of misty grey which, rapidly growing, finally becomes a mighty storm-cloud, blotting out both sun and horizon. A violent gust then heels your ship over; a deluge of rain whips the deck, soaking everyone to the skin, and then the squall rushes past as quickly as it came. A sudden roar, a downpour, and then all is quiet again.

Once again the sun shines dazzlingly on high, quickly drying the deck, the rigging, the sails and the sailors' shirts. Once again a serene blue sky gazes down on a calm, caressing sea, and the ship pursues her voyage with sails all set, borne along as before by a smooth, steady trade wind.

Now, too, all was peace and quiet aboard the clipper. The crew was "at

rest". It was an established custom that the sailors at such times were not disturbed except in case of emergency.

Sitting in the shade of the foremast, Luchkin was not sleeping like the rest of the crew — much to the surprise of the watch, for he had the reputation of being a heavy sleeper.

Humming softly to himself, he was busy sewing a pair of canvas shoes, now and again glancing down at Maximka (who was sprawling on the deck beside him fast asleep, his feet darkly set off by his new white trousers) to see whether the measurements he had taken right after dinner had been correct.

Evidently he became satisfied that they were so, for after a while he continued his work without further attention to the little black feet.

A warm, joyful feeling came over the hardened old drunkard at the thought that he was going to make a "tiptop" pair of shoes for the poor homeless orphan, and everything else he needed. Involuntarily he fell to thinking about his own past life which presented a dreary picture of endless drinking bouts and resultant floggings.

And he concluded to himself, not unreasonably, that had he not been such a fearless topman, whose daring feats had delighted every captain and chief officer under whom he had served, he would long ago have been consigned to the convict labour gang.

"Yes, that's why they let me off," he said aloud, and for some reason he sighed. "That's where the shoe pinches!" Whether the "pinch" referred to the fact that he was the ship's most notorious drunkard (who had never been known to go further ashore — except at Kronstadt — than the nearest tavern), or to the fact that only because of his powers as a topman he had not been made to taste the convict gang, was not clear. One thing was obvious, though: the idea of some kind of "pinch" in his life caused Luchkin to interrupt his singing for a few minutes and set him thinking, till finally he said:

"And Maximka will need a sailor's shirt, too. What is a sailor without a shirt!"

Taking advantage of the rest hour, Luchkin cut out the soles and the uppers for Maximka's shoes. The soles were of brand-new leather from the store, which Luchkin had bought on credit that morning from one of his shipmates, a thrifty sailor who had boots of his own.

Knowing how difficult it was for him to hang on to his money (especially ashore), Luchkin arranged that the debt should be paid for him by the bo'sun, who was to deduct it from his pay.

When the whistle sounded, followed by the bawling voice of the boatswain Vasily Yegorovich (Yegorych, as the sailors called him), Luchkin woke the sleeping boy. Even though he was only a passenger, he ought to live like the rest of the crew did, he reflected, or there might be trouble with Yegorych. He knew Yegorych to be a "decent chap" who didn't use his fists "unless he had good reason", but all the same, if he flew in a temper he might fetch the kid one for some "breach of routine". So it would be as well to teach ship's routine to the Negro from the start.

"Time to get up, Maximka," he said kindly, shaking the little boy by the shoulder.

Maximka opened his eyes and stretched, and seeing the other sailors already on their feet, jumped up quickly and gazed at Luchkin with a scared look of dog-like devotion.

"Don't be afraid, Maximka. What a silly kid you are, afraid of everything! Look, these are going to be some shoes for you."

And he pointed at his feet and at the canvas uppers of the shoes in his hand.

The boy had no idea what he was speaking about, but he probably sensed that they were kind words that he was saying, for he gave a broad grin. And he followed Luchkin trustfully down to the crew's quarters, looking on curiously as Luchkin stowed the half-made shoes away among the clothes and the linen in his sea-chest.

Still not understanding what he was talking about, but grinning back happily, he watched Luchkin take off his cap and point first at it and then at Maximka's head and try painstakingly to explain to him that he too was to have such a cap with a white top to it and a ribbon round the side.

Yet the Negro felt with all his little heart that these white men, who spoke quite a different language from the white men of the *Betsy*, were kindly disposed towards him, especially this sailor with the tow-coloured hair and red nose — which reminded him of cayenne pepper — who had given him that wonderful suit, treated him to all sorts of good things to eat and looked at him in a gentle, affectionate way that he had not known since babyhood when the eyes of some dimly remembered black-skinned woman had looked at him like that.

Those kind, loving eyes had remained in his memory, dimly connected in some way with the picture of lofty palm-trees and huts roofed with banana leaves. Whether they were something he'd dreamed about or whether they were a memory of his babyhood, he did not know, of course. But sometimes they appeared to him in his dreams and comforted him. And now he was seeing those kind, loving eyes not in dreams, but in reality.

And altogether his life on the clipper now was just like those happy dreams he had had — so different it was from the days of constant fear and suffering that he'd known before.

When Luchkin, abandoning his attempts to explain about the cap, burrowed into his chest and presented Maximka with a lump of sugar, the little boy was quite overwhelmed. He took one of the sailor's rough, horny hands in his own and stroked it gently and timidly, at the same time looking up at him with an expression of touching gratitude in his face — the expression of a downtrodden creature suddenly warmed by kindness. This gratitude shone in his face and his eyes, it showed itself in the tremor in his little voice as, in the heat of emotion, he murmured one or two guttural-sounding words in his native tongue before putting the sugar in his mouth.

"Well, you're an affectionate little beggar, I must say. Not used to friendly words, poor kid," said Luchkin in the gentlest tones his gruff voice was capable of and patted Maximka's cheek. "Go on, eat your sugar. It's nice!" he told him.

And in this way, in this dark corner of the orlop, a bond of friendship between the two, the veteran sailor and the little homeless Negro boy, was formally sealed. And each, it appeared, was very satisfied with the other.

"We shall have to teach you Russian, Maximka. Otherwise we'll never make out what you're jabbering about. But come, it's time to go on deck for gunnery drill. You can come and watch us."

They went up on deck and soon the drum sounded the signal for gunnery drill. Maximka, leaning against a mast so as not to be knocked off his feet by the sailors as they rushed to their stations, was at first rather frightened; but he soon lost his fears and watched, fascinated, the men run in the guns, quickly thrust the sponge into the barrels and then run them out through the ports again and freeze motionless beside them. He thought they were going to fire the guns and wondered what they were going to

fire at, since there were no sails in sight. He had once had experience of being under fire and had even seen a cannonball fall only just short of the *Betsy*'s stern as she scurried away, beating along the wind in full canvas, to escape some three-masted ship that was pursuing the slaver with her living cargo. He had seen the terrified look on the sailors' faces and heard the *Betsy*'s captain cursing and swearing until the pursuing ship began to drop astern, and he hadn't realised, of course, that the ship that had fired on them was an English man-of-war specially sent to capture "slave-traders" and had therefore rejoiced like the others when the *Betsy* outsailed her pursuer, the cruel captain thus escaping being hung on the yard-arm for his vile traffic in slaves.

But no shots were fired much as Maximka looked forward to it. But then he could listen, enthralled, to the roll of the drum, and watch Luchkin, who was captain of one of the guns and stood beside it, every now and then bending down to sight it.

The gunnery drill delighted Maximka; but he was hardly less delighted by the tea to which Luchkin treated him after the drill was over. At first he was rather astonished at the sight of the sailors sipping what appeared to be cups of hot water, nibbling sugar and sweating profusely in the process. But when Luchkin gave him a cup, too, and a lump of sugar with it, he quite enjoyed it and drank two cupfuls with relish.

As for his first Russian lesson, which Luchkin gave him that same evening as soon as the afternoon's heat had worn off and "one's head worked better", it must be admitted that it did not augur much success; and indeed Luchkin's painstaking but unavailing efforts to explain to the pupil that his name was Maximka and that of his teacher was Luchkin provided not a little amusement for the other sailors.

Luchkin, though he was no teacher, was so patient and gentle in his efforts to give the boy at least a grounding of Russian, starting with names, that the most qualified pedagogue, who would scarcely have had so many difficulties to contend with, might have envied him.

He contrived various ingenious methods for achieving his end and proceeded to put them into execution.

First he poked his finger into the boy's chest and said, "Maximka"; then pointed to himself and said, "Luchkin." This method, though repeated several times, not having any result, he walked away a short distance and called out "Maximka!" from there. Maximka grinned but still failed

to grasp the thing. So then Luchkin had another idea. He got one of the sailors to call out Maximka's name, and when he did so, he himself, with the satisfied air of one certain of success, pointed at the boy and, to make things double sure, shook him gently by the collar of his shirt. But alas! the boy laughed merrily, evidently interpreting the shaking as an invitation to dance. For he promptly jumped up and started to execute a lively dance — much to the delight of the onlooking sailors and even of Luchkin himself.

When his dance was over, Maximka could see that the sailors had been pleased by it, for many of them patted him on the back, shoulders and head, and said, laughing heartily:

"Bravo, Maximka! Good!"

It is difficult to say what success further attempts by Luchkin to teach the boy his name would have met with. He was just about to resume the lesson when the midshipman who spoke English appeared on the scene and greatly simplified matters by speaking to the boy in English and telling him that his name was not "Boy" but "Maximka" and that his friend's name was Luchkin.

"Now he knows the name you've given him," he said to Luchkin.

"Thank you very much, sir," said Luchkin, delighted. "I've tried all sorts of ways. He's a bright kid, but I just couldn't make him understand."

"Well, he understands now all right. Ask him and see."

"Maximka!"

The little boy pointed to himself.

"That's fine, sir! And who is Luchkin?" Luchkin asked the boy.

Maximka pointed to him.

And they both laughed heartily, and the other sailors joined in and said:

"Your little Negro's starting on his eddication!"

After that the lesson was easy sailing. Luchkin pointed to various objects and called them by their names, doing as much murder to the words at they would permit, convinced that in this "simplified" form they would sound more foreign and therefore be easier to remember. And by the time supper was piped Maximka could already repeat quite a number of words after him.

"Bravo, Luchkin! You're getting on fine! At this rate he'll know quite

a lot of Russian by the time we reach the Cape!" said the other ratings.

"You bet he will! It'll be at least twenty days before we reach the Cape. And Maximka's a clever boy!"

At the word "Maximka" the boy looked at Luchkin.

"He knows his name all right! Come along, old chap, we'll go and have supper."

After supper, when prayers had been said and the beds handed out for the night, Luchkin put the boy to bed on the deck beside him and, grateful and happy, Maximka lay down contentedly on his sailor's mattress with a pillow beneath his head and a big blanket to cover him — all these things having been procured by Luchkin from the mate.

"Now go to sleep, Maximka! We have to get up early tomorrow!"

But Maximka was already dropping off, after drowsily repeating (not at all badly for a first lesson) "Maximka" and "Lyuchiki", as he pronounced his friend's name.

Luchkin made the sign of the cross over the sleeping child and very soon he himself was snoring loudly.

At 12 o'clock he rose to go on watch and climbed aloft together with Leontyev, the foretopman.

They squatted there, after seeing that everything was in order, and started chatting to keep awake. They talked about Kronstadt and about former captains they had had and then relapsed into silence for a while.

"I say, Leontyev," said Luchkin suddenly, "have you really never been a vodka-drinker?"

Staid, sober, diligent Leontyev, who admired Luchkin for his seamanship, but at the same time rather looked down on him for his weakness for alcohol, answered emphatically:

"Never!"

"D'you mean to say you've never touched the stuff?"

"Now and again on a holiday I've had a glass, but that's all."

"That's why you always get your vodka ration in money?"

"Money's more useful, old chap. Back in Russia, when we're discharged, money will always come in useful."

"That's true enough."

"But what makes you speak about vodka, Luchkin?"

"Because I think you're a lucky chap."

Luchkin was silent for a little and then he said:

"Is it true that there's a charm against the booze?"

"So I heard. One of our petty officers on the *Kobchik* — he cured a man of it. He knew some magic word. And there's a chap on the *Zabiyaka* who can do it, too."

"Who?"

"Zakharych, the carpenter. But he keeps it a secret. It's not everyone that he'll do it for. But you don't mean to tell me that *you're* going to give up drinking, do you?" asked Leontyev, mockingly.

"I don't know about giving it up ... but I'd like to stop selling my clothes for drink."

"Why don't you try drinking in moderation?"

"I *have* tried. But it doesn't work, old chap. The moment I get at the stuff I'm done for! It seems it's my fate!"

"Fate has nothing to do with it — you haven't the sense, that's what!" said Leontyev sternly. "A man should be able to control himself. But have a word with Zakharych about it. Maybe he'll do it for you... Only I doubt it will work with you," he added mockingly.

"That's what I think too. Nothing could cure *me*!" said Luchkin, and for some reason he smiled, as if he was rather proud that he couldn't be cured.

VIII

Three weeks passed. The *Zabiyaka* had almost reached Cape Town, but was not able to make the harbour. A stiffish headwind was blowing "right in the teeth", as seamen say, sometimes reaching gale strength, and this prevented her from standing in. And wind and swell were so violent that it would have been in vain to try to get in under steam. It would have been a mere waste of coal.

So awaiting a change in the weather, the *Zabiyaka* lay off shore with reefed topsails, rolling heavily on the ocean swell.

Six or seven days passed in this way.

Then at last the wind dropped, and the ship, with smoke puffing out of her white funnel, steamed into Cape Town harbour.

Needless to relate how glad the sailors were.

Yet there was one member of the clipper's crew who not only was *not*

glad that they were coming into Cape Town, but became increasingly pensive and melancholy as the ship drew nearer to shore.

This was Luchkin, about to be separated from Maximka.

During the month that Luchkin — contrary to his shipmates' expectations — had so carefully looked after Maximka, he had grown very attached to him, and the little Negro, for his part, had grown no less attached to *him*. The two could understand each other quite well now, for Luchkin had proved an excellent teacher and Maximka had been a bright, intelligent pupil and could now scrape together enough Russian to make himself understood. The better they got to know each other the better friends they became. Maximka now had two changes of clothes, a pair of shoes, a cap and a sailor's knife on a strap. He proved to be a bright, merry-hearted boy and was soon a favourite with the entire crew. Even Yegorych the boatswain, who could not abide "useless passengers", was very well disposed towards the boy, since Maximka always pulled a rope with the others, and altogether did all he could to be of use on board and "work his passage" as you might say. He went aloft as nimbly as a monkey and showed not the slightest fear when there was a storm, and altogether was in every respect a real sailor-boy.

Extremely gentle and good-natured, he often used to amuse the sailors by dancing in the forecastle or singing his native songs in a clear ringing voice. Everybody made a great fuss of him, and Artyushka, the midshipman's servant, often used to bring him cakes and other titbits left over from the wardroom table.

Needless to say he was utterly devoted to Luchkin and followed him about wherever he went like a little dog. He used to climb to the top to share his watches with him and sit with him at the look-out station in the bows, and he tried very hard to learn to say the Russian words which Luchkin taught him.

Already the steep cliffs of Cape Town harbour were drawing near. The *Zabiyaka* was coming in at full speed and was expected to anchor in the harbour at about noon.

It was a wonderfully bright, sunny morning, yet Luchkin looked anything but cheerful and was polishing the gun he was working on with furious zeal. Beside him, assisting where he could, stood Maximka.

"We'll be soon saying good-bye, Maximka lad. They're going to put you ashore at the Cape. What else can we do with you?"

The boy, who had never given a thought to the future and who could not understand much of what Luchkin said, sensed all the same from the melancholy expression on his face that his words had been sad ones, and his lively, sensitive face, quick to reflect his thoughts and feelings, clouded suddenly and he said:

"Me no understand, Lyuchika."

"They're going to put you ashore, old chap. I'll be sailing on, but Maximka will stay here."

And he tried to explain his meaning by signs.

Evidently the boy understood him now, for he seized Luchkin's hand and said to him in a voice of entreaty:

"Me not send shore... Me stay here... Maximka, Lyuchika, Lyuchika, Maximka. Me Russian sailor... Yes, yes..."

At these words a sudden idea struck Luchkin.

"Would you like to be a Russian sailor, Maximka?"

"Yes, yes," said Maximka again, nodding his little head vigorously.

"That would be fine, now! Why ever didn't I think of it before? I must speak to the others about it, and we can get the bo'sun to put it before the chief officer."

A few minutes later he was talking to the men in the forecastle:

"I say, boys! Maximka doesn't want to leave us! Let's ask permission for him to stay on board as a sailor. What do you say?"

The sailors expressed their liveliest approval of the idea.

So Luchkin went to the boatswain and asked him to convey the men's request to the chief officer.

"Please do us that favour, Yegorych," he added. "Ask the chief officer. Tell him Maximka wants to stay and all that. What could he do if we left him all alone on the Cape? Anything might happen to the poor kid there. It would be a shame, Yegorych. He's a good, honest little boy, now isn't he?"

"Well yes, I'll report it. Maximka's a tidy little boy. Only I'm not so sure the captain will agree to having a Negro aboard a Russian man-of-war—that's the trouble."

"That needn't be any trouble, Yegorych. We could make him a Christian."

"How do you mean?"

"We could have him baptised into our Church and then he'd be a Russian Negro, see!"

The idea appealed to Yegorych and he promised to convey the men's request to the chief officer forthwith.

The latter heard the boatswain out, then said:

"I suppose Luchkin's at the back of this."

"It's not only Luchkin, sir — the whole crew is making this request. What will become of him if we put him ashore here? The men feel sorry for him. We could make him a cabin-boy if it comes to that, sir! He's a good little worker, if I may say so. And if we were to baptise him, then we could save his soul."

The chief officer promised to speak to the captain about it.

When the captain came on deck for the hoisting of the flag, the chief officer told him of the men's request.

At first the captain was for refusing it point-blank; but after thinking it over — and probably thinking of his own children at home, — he changed his mind and said:

"All right. He can stay. We'll make him a cabin-boy. And when we get back to Kronstadt we'll do something for him there. Really — why should he be put ashore, especially if he wants to stay! And let Luchkin continue to be his tutor... Strange, isn't it — a drunkard like that, yet he's devoted to the boy. The surgeon tells me he's made all his clothes for him."

When the forecastle heard that permission had been given for Maximka to remain on board there was great rejoicing. Gladdest of all, of course, were Luchkin and Maximka.

At one o'clock the ship anchored in the roads of Cape Town, and next morning the men of the first watch were given shore leave. Among those allowed ashore were Luchkin and Maximka.

"Mind you don't sell Maximka for drink!" laughed Yegorych, as they left the clipper.

This shot evidently went home, for Luchkin replied:

"How do you know, maybe, because of Maximka, I'll come back quite sober tonight!"

Although he was dead drunk as usual that night, yet for once he came back in all his clothes, greatly to everyone's astonishment. As it turned out afterwards, he owed this entirely to Maximka, who, seeing how hard his

friend was drinking, had run off to a neighbouring tavern and fetched some other Russian sailors who picked Luchkin up and carried him back to the boat, with Maximka ever at his side.

Luchkin kept babbling drunkenly all the way:

"Where's Maximka? Bring me Maximka. I haven't sold him for drink, boys. He's my greatest pal. Where is Maximka?"

And when he found Maximka by his side he calmed down and fell asleep.

A week later the *Zabiyaka* left the Cape of Good Hope, and soon afterwards Maximka was solemnly baptised and rechristened Maximka, with Zabiyakin (from the name of the ship) for his surname.

Three years later he came to Kronstadt aboard the *Zabiyaka* a full-grown boy of fourteen and able, thanks to the pains Petya the midshipman had taken with him, both to read and write.

The captain kept his promise and got him a place in the Kronstadt training school for sick-berth attendants. And Luchkin, discharged from the navy, settled in Kronstadt so as to be near his pet. He devoted himself heart and soul to Maximka's welfare, and thanks to him even gave up selling his clothes to get drink and learnt to drink "in moderation".

Vsevolod Garshin

THE SIGNAL

Translated by *Bernard Isaacs*

Vsevolod Garshin was born in 1855 and died in 1888 at the early age of thirty-three, but in his short lifetime he managed to write over a dozen stories and tales. Almost all of them are for grown-ups, although children's reading and upbringing always interested him. Garshin joined a teachers' circle in St. Petersburg, whose aim was to help parents with the upbringing of their children and the selection of their reading. As a member of this circle Garshin edited the yearly *Review of Children's Literature* for 1885 and 1886, and also translated several foreign tales. Soviet children love Garshin's stories, "The Proud Palm-Tree", "The Tale of the Toad and the Rose", and especially his "The Frog Went Travelling" in which he used the theme of the ancient Indian fable about the turtle and the wild geese.

The short story "The Signal" first appeared in 1887 in a magazine for grown-ups but became immediately popular with children.

Semyon Ivanov was a track-walker. His cabin was twelve versts away from the railway station in one direction, and ten in the other. A large spinning mill had been opened the year before about four versts away, and its tall chimney rose darkly from behind the forest. The only dwellings around were the cabins of the neighbouring track-walkers.

Semyon was a sick, broken-down man. He had been in the war nine years before, serving all through the campaign as an officer's batman. He had known hunger, and cold, and blazing heat, and had made forty- or fifty-verst marches in heat and cold, rain and shine. He had been under fire, too, but no bullet, thank God, had got him. His regiment had once been in the firing line, and there had been skirmishing with the Turks for a whole week. Our men had lain on this side of a glen, the Turks on the other, and there had been a steady crossfire from morning till evening. Semyon's officer was there too; three times a day Semyon brought him his meals and a boiling samovar from the regimental kitchen in the ravine. He carried the samovar through a clearing, and the bullets whizzed around him and smacked against the rocks. Semyon was terrified, and sometimes he cried, but he kept straight on. The officers were pleased with him, because they always had hot tea. He came home from the war unharmed, but his legs and arms began to ache. He fell on evil days. Coming home, he found that his old father had died; his four-year-old son had died, too, from some throat trouble. Semyon was left all alone in the world with his wife. They could not work the farm; ploughing the land with rheumatic arms and legs was no easy task. Life in their home village became unbearable, and so they set out to seek their fortune in other places. They tried their luck in Kherson, and on the Don, but without success. Then the wife went into domestic service, while Semyon continued to wander about. Once he happened to ride on an engine, and at one of the stations the face of the station-master seemed familiar to him. Semyon looked at the station-master, and the station-master looked at Semyon, and they recognised each other. He had been an officer in their regiment.

"You are Ivanov?" he said.

"Yessir."

"What are you doing here?"

Semyon told him all about it.

"Where are you going now?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Idiot! What do you mean, you don't know?"

"I mean I have nowhere to go, sir. I am looking for a job, sir."

The station-master looked at him, thought a bit, then said: "Look here, old chap, you stay here at the station for a time. You're married, aren't you? Where is your wife?"

"Yessir, I'm married. My wife's in the town of Kursk, in service with a merchant there."

"Well then, write her to come here. I'll get you a free ticket. There will soon be a vacancy as track-walker here. I'll speak to the division chief about you."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Semyon.

And so he stayed at the station. He helped in the station-master's kitchen, chopped firewood and swept the yard and the platform. In a fortnight's time his wife arrived and they went out together to their railway cabin on a hand-trolley. The cabin was newly built and warm, with as much firewood as you wanted; there was a small vegetable patch left over from the previous tenants, and about half a dessiatine of arable land on either side of the track. Semyon was delighted; he began to think of how he would do some farming, buy himself a cow and a horse.

He was given the necessary outfit — a green flag, a red flag, lanterns, a horn, a hammer, a wrench for tightening the nuts, a crowbar, a spade, brooms, bolts, and rail-spikes, they also gave him two books of regulations and a timetable. At the beginning Semyon did not sleep for nights at a stretch, learning the timetable by heart; two hours before a train was due he would go over his section, then sit down on the bench outside his cabin, looking out all the time and listening whether the rails were humming, whether a train could be heard rumbling. He learned the regulations, too, by heart, although he could barely spell out the words.

It was summer; the work was not hard; no snow to clear away, and trains on that line were infrequent. Semyon would go over his verst of track twice a day, tightening up nuts here and there, levelling down the bed, and examining the water pipes, and then go home to attend to his household. The trouble there was that he always had to get the inspector's permission for the least little thing he wanted to do. The inspector had to report to the division chief, and all this took a long time. Semyon and his wife were getting tired of it.

Two months went by; Semyon began to make the acquaintance of his track-walker neighbours. One was a very old man, whom the authorities

were always meaning to relieve; he could barely move out of his cabin and his wife did all the work for him. The other track-walker, the one nearer the station, was a young man, rather skinny but wiry. He and Semyon met for the first time on the line midway between their cabins when going over their sections; Semyon raised his hat and bowed.

"How d'ye do, neighbour," he said.

The neighbour glanced askance at him.

"How d'ye do," he said, and turned away.

Later their wives met each other. Semyon's wife Arina greeted the neighbour, but the latter did not say much either and went away. Semyon met her once.

"Your husband isn't very chatty, young woman, is he?"

The woman did not say anything at first, then replied: "What's he got to talk about? Every man has his own worries. God be with you."

However, after a month or so, they became acquainted. Semyon and Vasily would meet on the line, sit down on the edge of the embankment, smoke their pipes and talk about life. Vasily did not have much to say for himself, but Semyon talked about his home village and the campaign he had been through.

"Yes, I've had a pretty tough time," he said, "and God knows I'm not that old. I've had no luck. You've got to put up with the lot that God gives you. Yes, brother Vasily, that's how it is."

Vasily knocked the ash out of his pipe, stood up, and said:

"It's not bad luck or God's lot that's getting us down, but the people around us. There isn't a beast on earth as cruel and vicious as human beings are. Wolf doesn't eat wolf, but a man will just swallow another man whole."

"Don't tell me that, brother. A wolf does eat wolf."

"That was just by way of talking. All the same, man's a nasty beast. If it wasn't for his being so wicked and greedy, life wouldn't be so bad. Everyone tries to take a snap at you, bite off a piece of you, swallow you up."

Semyon pondered.

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe you're right, and if you are, then it's God's will."

"If that's the way you think," said Vasily, "then I have nothing to talk to you about. If you're going to blame God for all that's bad, and just sit and bear it, then you're not a man, but an animal. That's my opinion."

And he turned and went away without saying good-bye. Semyon also

got up. "Neighbour!" he shouted. "There's no need to get angry."

But Vasily did not look round. Semyon gazed after him until he was lost to sight at a dip in the bend. He came home and said to his wife:

"Well, Arina, that neighbour of ours is a nasty piece o' goods, let me tell you."

However, they did not quarrel; they met again and discussed the same things.

"Ah, brother, if it wasn't for men, you and I would not be poking around in these cabins," said Vasily.

"What's wrong with the cabins, they're not so bad."

"Not so bad, not so bad... Ugh, you! You have lived long and learned little, looked at much and seen little. What sort of life is it for a poor man in a cabin here or anywhere else? These blood-suckers are eating you up alive, squeezing you dry, and when you get old they'll chuck you just as they would chuck husks to the pigs. How much do you get in wages?"

"Not much, Vasily — twelve rubles."

"And I get thirteen fifty. I ask you — why? According to the company's regulations we are all entitled to fifteen rubles a month, heating and lighting free. Now who decides that you should have twelve and I thirteen and a half? Whose pocket does the other three or one and a half rubles go into? Can you tell me that? And you say — it's not bad! It isn't even a question of one and a half or three rubles. Even if they paid the full fifteen. Last month I was at the station when the director rode through: I saw him — I had that honour. Travelled in a special coach all to himself; came out on the platform, stood there showing the gold chain on his belly, cheeks red and fat. Bloated with our blood that he's sucked up. Ah, if I had the power! No, I shan't stay here long; I'll go away somewhere, anywhere."

"But where will you go, Vasily? You won't find anything better. At least here you have a warm house, a piece of land. Your wife is a help."

"Land! You ought to see that piece of land. Not a stick growing on it. I planted some cabbages in the spring, and the inspector comes along and says, 'Hullo, what's this? Why didn't you report it? Why didn't you ask permission? Dig them up, the whole bally lot.' He was drunk. At any other time he would not have said anything, but this time he says, 'Three rubles fine!' just to have it his own way."

Vasily paused, sucking at his pipe, then said quietly:

"I could've knocked the fellow's brains out."

"You're a hot-tempered one, neighbour, let me tell you."

"Temper has nothing to do with it. I speak the truth and I think for myself. He's asking for trouble and he'll get it, that fat mug! I'll complain to the division chief, I will. You'll see."

And so he did.

The division chief once came to inspect the line. Some important personages from St. Petersburg were expected in three days' time; they were making a tour of inspection, and so everything had to be put in order before their arrival. The bed was ballasted and levelled, the sleepers were carefully examined, the spikes driven in a bit harder, the nuts tightened up, the posts painted, and yellow sand was sprinkled at the level crossings. The woman at the neighbouring cabin turned her old man out to weed. Semyon worked all the week. He put everything in order, mended and cleaned his tunic, and polished up his brass plate with brick dust until it fairly shone. Vasily worked too. The division chief arrived in a trolley, four men working the handles so that the gears whirred and the wheels hummed as the trolley hurtled down the line. It came flying up to Semyon's cabin: Semyon ran up and reported in soldierly fashion. Everything was found to be in order.

"Have you been here long?" the chief inquired.

"Since the second of May, sir."

"All right. Thank you. And who is at number one sixty-four?"

The traffic inspector (he was travelling with the chief on the trolley) answered:

"Vasily Spiridov."

"Spiridov, Spiridov... Ah, is that the man you reported last year?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well then, let's see this Vasily Spiridov. Move on!"

The men fell to work on the handles and the trolley got under way.

Semyon watched it, thinking: "Well, there's going to be trouble."

A couple of hours later he started on his round. He saw someone coming down the track from the dip in the bend. A closer look showed him that it was Vasily. He had a stick in his hand and a small bundle over his shoulder, and his cheek was bound up in a handkerchief.

"Where are you off to, neighbour?" shouted Semyon.

Vasily came up quite close. He looked awful, his face white as chalk, his eyes blazing; his voice, when he spoke, was choky.

"I'm going to town," he muttered. "To Moscow ... to the Head Office."

"The Head Office? Ah, you are going to complain, I suppose? Drop it, Vasily, forget it."

"No, mate, I won't forget. It's too late to forget. Look, he hit me in the face, drew blood. I won't forget it as long as I live, and I won't drop it. They've got to be taught a lesson, those blood-suckers."

"Drop it, Vasily," Semyon said, taking his arm. "Believe me, you won't better things."

"Better things! I know myself I won't better things; you were right about fate. It won't do me any good, but a man must stand up for right."

"Yes, but how did it happen?"

"How? He looked everything over, got off the trolley, looked into the cabin. I knew beforehand that he'd be strict, so I had everything shipshape. He was about to go away when I made my complaint. He started shouting right away: 'Here's a government inspection coming down and you make a complaint about a vegetable garden, damn you! Privy councillors are coming, and he talks about his cabbage!' I answered something back, I couldn't help myself; it wasn't so bad, really, but he took it amiss. So he lashed me in the face. Our accursed patience! I should have given him one, too, but instead I just stood there as if it was the right thing. When they went away, I came to myself, washed my face, and started off."

"And what about the cabin?"

"My wife is there. She will look after things. To hell with their railway!"

Vasily got up to go.

"Good-bye, Semyon. I don't know whether I'll find anyone to listen to me."

"Surely you are not going to walk?"

"I'll try to get a lift on a goods train at the station, and tomorrow I'll be in Moscow."

The neighbours took leave of each other. Vasily was away for some time. His wife did his work for him, and went without sleep night and day; she was eaten up with anxiety. On the third day the commission arrived: an engine, a luggage-van, and two first-class carriages, but there was still no sign of Vasily. On the fourth day Semyon met his wife. Her face was swollen from crying and her eyes were red.

"Has he come back?" Semyon asked.

But the woman made a hopeless gesture and went her way without saying a word.

Semyon had learned, when still a lad, to make pipes out of osier-rods. He would burn the core out of a rod, drill holes in it, make a mouthpiece at one end, and tune the thing so well that you could play almost any air on it. He made quite a number of these pipes in his spare time and sent them to the market in town by goods train conductors of his acquaintance; he fetched two kopeks a piece there. The day after the commission's visit he left his wife at home to meet the six o'clock evening train, and went into the woods with a knife to cut some osier-rods. He went to the end of his section — at this point the line made a sharp bend — descended the embankment and struck downhill into the woods. About half a verst away there was a big marsh with excellent osiers for his pipes growing on the edge of it. He cut a bundle of sticks and started home through the woods. The sun stood low; the only sounds in the deathly stillness were the twittering of the birds and the crackle of the deadwood underfoot. As he walked on, nearing the embankment, Semyon fancied he heard a sound like that of iron striking iron. He quickened his pace. No repairs were being made on his section. What could it mean? He came out on the fringe of the woods — the railway embankment rose up before him; on the top a man was squatting, doing something to the track; Semyon crept up quietly: he thought the man was after the nuts. But when the man stood up, he saw a crowbar in his hands; he had placed it under the rail, torn it up and was moving it aside. Everything went dark before Semyon's eyes; he wanted to cry out but he could not. Then he saw that it was Vasily. He ran, and Vasily, with a crowbar and a wrench in his hands, tumbled head over heels down the other side of the embankment.

"Vasily! Man alive, come back! Give me the crowbar! We'll put the rail back, no one will know. Come back! Don't take this sin on your soul!"

Vasily did not look back; he plunged into the woods.

Semyon stood looking at the torn-up rail; he had thrown down his bundle of osiers. It was a passenger train that was due, not a goods train. And he had nothing to stop it with, no flag. He could not replace the rail; you could not drive the spikes in with your bare hands. He must run, run back to his cabin for some tools. "God help me!" he gasped.

Breathless, he started running towards his cabin. He ran, stumbling, almost dropping. He cleared the forest; the cabin was only a few hundred feet away at the most, but just then the mill whistle sounded. It was six o'clock. In two minutes' time the train was due to pass. Good God! Save those innocent souls! Semyon could almost see it: the engine strikes the

edge of the rail with its left wheel; it shudders, careens, rips up the sleepers, smashes them to pieces, and right there is a curve, a bend, a seventy-foot embankment, down which it goes toppling, its third-class coaches chock-full of people, little children... All sitting in the train now, little dreaming of the peril. God, tell me what to do! No, there is no time to run to the cabin and back again...

Just short of the cabin, Semyon turned back and ran faster than ever. He ran blindly, not knowing himself what he was going to do. He came to the torn-up rail; his sticks lay there in a heap. Bending down, he picked one of them up, not knowing why, and ran on. He thought he could hear the train coming already. He heard the distant whistle, felt the quiet steady tremor of the rails. His strength gave out, he could run no more. He stopped within two hundred and fifty yards of the awful spot. A light burst upon his mind. Taking off his cap, he took out of it a cotton handkerchief, pulled his knife out of his boot top, and crossed himself, muttering, "God help me!"

He slashed his left arm with the knife above the elbow; the blood spurted out in a hot stream; he soaked his handkerchief in it, then smoothed it out, tied it to the stick and hung out his red flag.

He stood there, waving his flag. The train was already in sight. The engine-driver would not see him, he would come up too close to be able to stop the heavy train at two hundred and fifty yards!

The blood kept flowing; he pressed the gashed arm to his side to stem the flow, but it was no use. He must have cut his arm very deep. He felt dizzy, and black specks danced before his eyes; then all grew dark, and there was a loud ringing in his ears. He neither saw the train nor heard its noise. There was but one thought in his mind: "I shall fall, I shall drop the flag; the train will pass over me. Help me, God!"

And the world went black in his eyes, his mind became a blank, and he dropped the flag; but the blood-stained banner did not fall to the ground. A hand seized it and held it aloft before the oncoming train. The driver saw it, shut off the governor and reversed steam. The train came to a standstill.

People jumped out of the carriages and gathered round in a crowd. They saw a man, covered with blood, lying unconscious on the track, and another man standing next to him with a blood-stained rag on a stick.

Vasily ran his eye over the crowd, then hung his head, saying, "Tie me up, I tore the rail up."

Lev Tolstoy

A PRISONER IN THE CAUCASUS
(A True Story)

Translated by *Angus Roxburgh*

Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910), the great Russian writer known throughout the world for his novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, devoted many years of his life to the education of children and writing books for them. In his Yasnaya Polyana country estate he built a school for village children and taught in it himself. He edited the pedagogical journal *Yasnaya Polyana*, and in 1872 wrote his famous *ABC* and with it four books for children's reading.

To help him in his work Tolstoy studied Ancient Greek and learnt to read Arabic and Hindi. In his books for children's reading he retold some tales by Charles Perrault, by the Grimm brothers, by Hans Christian Andersen, tales from *A Thousand and One Nights*, and also Russian folk tales. Many of the stories in these four books Tolstoy wrote himself. One of them is "A Prisoner in the Caucasus".

In his lifetime, his *ABC* became the officially recognised textbook for elementary schools.

I

A certain gentleman, whose name was Zhilin, was serving in the Caucasus as an officer.

One day he received a letter from home. His aging mother wrote. 'I have grown old, and should like to see my beloved son before I die. Come and bid adieu to me, bury me, then return to your service, and may God be with you. I have found a bride for you who is both clever and pretty, and landed too. If you like her, perhaps you will marry and stay for good.'

This set Zhilin thinking: to be sure, his mother was in poor health, and he might never see her again. Why not go? And if the bride was to his liking he could even marry.

He obtained leave of absence from his colonel, bade his comrades farewell and treated his men to four pailfuls of vodka as a parting gesture. Then he made ready for the road.

At that time there was a war on in the Caucasus, and the roads were too dangerous to travel either by day or by night. If any of the Russians left the fortress, he was in peril of being killed or taken off to mountains by the Tatars. For this reason a body of footsoldiers escorted civilians in and out of the fortress twice a week.

It was summer. The wagons and their convoy were ready at first light and set out at once from the fortress. Zhilin rode on horseback, with his baggage in one of the wagons.

There were twenty-five versts to go, and the wagon-train made slow progress; either the soldiers would halt for a rest, or somebody's wagon would lose a wheel, or a horse would pull up — and each time the whole convoy would have to stop and wait.

They had only covered half the distance when the sun passed its highest point. It was hot and dusty, and there was nowhere to shelter from the scorching sun. All around was bare steppeland, without a tree or bush in sight.

Zhilin rode out ahead, then stopped and waited for the wagons to catch up. Hearing the sound of a bugle — the signal to halt — he reflected, 'Perhaps it would be better to ride on alone, without the soldiers? I have a fine horse under me: if I do come across any Tatars I'll get away. Or should I?..'

While he was considering this another officer, Kostylin, who was armed, rode up to him and said, 'Let's go on alone, Zhilin. I'm terribly hungry, and it's so hot. I could positively wring this shirt out!' And indeed, sweat was pouring from Kostylin, who was a corpulent fellow, and his face was bright red.

Zhilin thought for a moment and asked, 'Is your gun loaded?'

'Yes.'

'Come on then. But let's stick together.'

And so they rode on ahead, following the track across the steppe, chatting and keeping their eyes skinned. The prospect was clear for miles around.

Presently the steppe came to an end and the road ran through a gorge, and Zhilin said, 'We'll have to nip it up to the top and take a look; they could easily catch us unawares.'

'What's the point?' Kostylin objected. 'Let's push on.'

Zhilin would not listen.

'No,' he said. 'You wait here, and I'll have a quick look round.'

And he rode off up the slope on the left. Zhilin's steed was a hunting horse, which he had bought as a wild foal for a hundred rubles and broken in himself. Like lightning it carried him up the steep incline, and no sooner had he reached the top than he beheld a troop of Tatar horsemen — about thirty of them — right under his nose. He turned back at once, but the Tatars had seen him, and gave chase, drawing their guns as they rode. Zhilin raced down the hill at full gallop, crying to Kostylin to get out his gun and praying that his own horse would not fail him: 'If you stumble, I'm done for. But if I can only get to the gun, I'm damned if I'll be caught by them.'

But Kostylin, instead of waiting, was off like a shot, back to the fortress, the very moment he caught sight of the Tatars, lashing his horse on either side. Only the horse's tail could be seen waving in the dust.

Zhilin could see he was in a mess. The gun was gone, and with only a sabre he could do nothing. He spurred his horse, but saw that six Tatars were riding across to cut him off. He had a fine mount, but theirs were even better, and now they were cutting across his path. He tried to turn his horse, but it was at a full gallop and he could not stop it from making straight towards them. He could see a red-bearded Tatar on a grey horse coming closer, screaming, with his teeth bared and his gun at the ready.

'Well,' thought Zhilin, 'I know what you devils are like: if you take me alive you'll put me in a hole in the ground and thrash me with whips. Well, I shan't give myself up alive.'

Zhilin may have been a small man, but he had spunk. Unsheathing his sabre, he steered his horse straight towards the Tatar with the red beard. 'Either I'll knock you down with my horse,' he thought, 'or I'll hack you down with my sabre.'

But before Zhilin reached his foe, his horse was hit by a bullet from behind and crashed to the ground, landing on Zhilin's leg.

He tried to get up, but two stinking Tatars were already upon him, twisting his arms back. He broke free, and threw off the Tatars, but three more of them jumped down from their horses and began beating him on the head with the butts of their guns. His head swam and he reeled. The Tatars seized him, took the spare girths from their saddles, twisted his arms behind his back, tied them with a Tatar knot, and dragged him away. They knocked his cap off, pulled off his boots, stripped him of his money and watch, and ripped his clothes. When Zhilin looked back at his horse he saw the poor animal lying on its side just where it had fallen, kicking its legs but unable to make contact with the ground. There was a hole in its head, through which dark blood was gushing, soaking the dust for a yard all around.

One of the Tatars went up to it and set about removing the saddle. Still it kicked about, until he took his dagger and slit its throat. There was a hiss from its neck, and the horse shuddered and died.

The Tatars removed its saddle and harness. The red-bearded one mounted his horse, and the others seated Zhilin on the saddle behind him, tying him round the waist to the Tatar so that he could not fall off. Then they bore him away into the mountains.

Sitting behind the rider, Zhilin's face was pushed against the Tatar's fetid back. All he could see was this mighty back, and a sinewy neck, and a bluish, shaven head below a hat. Zhilin's head was badly smashed, and the blood had congealed over his eyes, but he could neither sit up straight on the horse nor wipe away the blood. His arms were twisted so far that his collar-bones ached.

They rode for a long time, uphill and downhill, forded a river and continued along a track through a valley.

Zhilin thought he would make a mental note of the route by which he

was being taken, but his eyes were caked with blood and he could not turn.

Dusk began to fall. They crossed another stream, and as they rode up a stony hillside there was a smell of smoke and dogs could be heard barking.

When they arrived at their village, or *aul*, the Tatars dismounted, and Zhilin was surrounded by the village children, who squeaked with delight and threw stones at him.

His captor drove off the children, pulled him down from the saddle and called a workman. A Caucasian with jutting cheekbones came, wearing only a ragged shirt that left his chest bare. The Tatar issued some order, and the workman brought a shackle, which consisted of two oaken blocks mounted on iron rings and fastened with a padlock.

They unbound Zhilin's arms and put the shackle round his ankle, then led him to a shed, pushed him in, and locked the door. Zhilin fell into a pile of manure. After lying for a moment, he groped around in the dark for a more pleasant spot, and lay down.

2

Zhilin scarcely slept all night. The nights were short, and presently he saw light appearing through a chink. He got up, scraped at the chink to make it bigger, and peeped out.

He could see a track, leading downhill, and to the right a Tatar hut with two trees beside it. A black dog lay on the threshold and there was a nanny-goat with her kids, jerking their tails. Then he saw a young Tatar woman coming up the hill, wearing a flowered ungirt blouse, trousers and boots. She had a caftan draped over her head, and her back was taut as she carried a large tin pitcher of water on top of her head and led a shaven-headed boy, dressed only in a shirt, by the hand. The woman took the water into the hut, and then the red-bearded Tatar of the previous day came out, wearing a quilted silk coat, sandals on his bare feet, and a silver dagger slung from his belt. On his head he had a tall, black sheepskin hat, tilted backwards. He came out, stretching himself and smoothing his red beard. He stood there for a moment, ordered his workman to do something, and went off somewhere.

Next, two fellows rode past on horses, apparently from the watering-

place, as the horses' noses were wet. Some more closely-cropped lads, in shirts but no trousers, came running up to the shed in a crowd, and poked a long switch into the chink. Zhilin had but to shoo at them and they all shrieked and took to their heels.

Zhilin was thirsty – his throat was dry – and he wished somebody would come. Suddenly he heard the door opening: it was the red-bearded Tatar, and with him was another man, shorter and dark-haired. He had a ruddy, smiling face with black, shining eyes and a little clipped beard. He was even better dressed, in a blue silk coat trimmed with silver braid, and with a large silver dagger at his belt; he wore fine red morocco slippers, also embroidered with silver, and on top of these a pair of stout boots. His hat was tall, and made of white sheepskin.

The Tatar with the red beard came in, grumbled something that sounded like a curse, and leaned against the door-post, fingering his knife and louring at Zhilin like a wolf. But the dark-haired one, who was lively and nimble, as though walking on springs, went straight up to Zhilin, got down on his haunches, grinned and patted him on the shoulder, and broke into a stream of words in his own language, clicking his tongue and winking, and repeating the words, 'Good, Russky! Good, Russky!'

Zhilin did not understand anything, and said, 'Drink, give me some water to drink!'

The dark-haired one laughed, 'Good, Russky,' and rattled on in Tatar.

Zhilin indicated with his lips and hands that he wanted something to drink.

The Tatar understood at last, laughed, and called through the door, 'Dina!'

A girl came running. She was a slip of a thing, about thirteen, and facially like the dark-haired man, who was clearly her father. Like him, she had shining black eyes and a handsome face. She wore a long blue shirt with wide sleeves and no belt, trimmed with red along the hem, neck and sleeves. Below this she wore trousers and slippers, and over the slippers high-heeled shoes. Around her neck was a necklace made of Russian fifty-kopeck pieces. She was bareheaded and wore her black hair in a plait tied with a ribbon, on which were hung various pendants and a silver ruble.

At her father's bidding, she dashed off and came back with a little tin jug. She handed over the water, then squatted down so low that her

shoulders disappeared below her knees, and stared, wide-eyed, at Zhilin drinking, as though he were some wild animal.

Zhilin handed her the jug, and she leapt back like a wild goat. Even her father had to laugh. He sent her away again and she ran off with the empty jug. Soon she returned with some unleavened bread on a wooden plate and again squatted down with her eyes glued on Zhilin.

When he had eaten, the Tatars left, locking the door behind them.

Some time later the Caucasian servant appeared and said to Zhilin, '*Aida!*' He didn't speak Russian either, but Zhilin understood that he was to go somewhere.

He followed the servant outside, dragging the shackle. He found himself in a Tatar village of about ten houses and a church with a little tower. Three saddled horses were standing outside one of the houses, their reins held by some boys. The dark Tatar popped out of the door and beckoned to Zhilin to come over. Then he went inside again, still laughing and chattering away in his own tongue. Zhilin went in. It was an attractive room with polished clay walls; some gaily coloured feather-beds were piled up against the facing wall, while the side-walls were hung with expensive carpets; these carpets, in turn, were hung with guns, pistols and sabres, all made of silver. At one wall stood a small stove. The earthen floor was as clean as a threshing floor, and the whole of one corner was covered with thick felts, on top of which there were rugs and feather cushions. And sitting on these rugs, propped up on the cushions and wearing slippers, were five Tatars: the dark one, the red one, and three guests. In front of them they had a plateful of millet pancakes, a bowl of molten butter, and a jug of Tatar beer, or *buza*. They were eating with their hands, which were covered in grease.

The dark-haired one jumped up, told Zhilin to sit at some distance, not on the rug but on the bare floor, clambered back to his place and pressed pancakes and *buza* on his guests. The servant motioned Zhilin to his place, and then took off his own upper shoes, which he put beside the others near the door. He sat down on a felt mat closer to his masters, and gazed at them eating, slobbering and wiping his mouth.

When the men had finished their pancakes, a Tatar woman came in, wearing a shirt the same as the girl's, trousers and a kerchief. She took away the butter and plates, and brought an attractive wash-tub and a jug with a slender neck. The men washed their hands, then folded their arms,

knelt, blew around them, and said their prayers. They spoke in their own tongue. Then one of the guests turned to Zhilin and addressed him in Russian.

'You were captured,' he said, 'by Kazi-Muhamed' – he pointed to the red-bearded Tatar – 'and he gave you to Abdul-Murat' – he pointed to the dark-haired one. 'Abdul-Murat is now your master.'

Zhilin was silent.

Abdul-Murat began speaking, all the while laughing and pointing at Zhilin, and interposing, 'Russky soldier, good Russky.'

The interpreter explained, 'He orders you to write a letter home, telling your people to send a ransom for you. As soon as the money comes he will release you.'

Zhilin gave this some thought, and said, 'How much does he want?'

The Tatars conferred; then the interpreter said, 'Three thousand rubles.'

'No,' said Zhilin, 'I have not got this kind of money.'

Abdul leapt to his feet and began waving his arms about, haranguing Zhilin as though he could understand him. The interpreter translated. 'How much can you pay, then?'

Zhilin thought for a moment and then said, 'Five hundred rubles.'

At this, all the Tatars began talking quickly and at once. Abdul yelled at the red-bearded one, spraying him with spittle. But Kazi-Muhamed merely screwed up his eyes and clicked his tongue.

When they quietened down, the interpreter said, 'Your master needs more than five hundred rubles. He paid two hundred for you himself. Kazi-Muhamed owed him money, and he took you in payment of the debt. Three thousand rubles – nothing less will do. And if you don't write, you'll be put in a pit and punished with whips.'

'Hmm,' thought Zhilin, 'with these people, if you show you're afraid it's all the worse for you.'

He jumped to his feet and said, 'Well, you tell him, the dog, that if he tries to threaten me I shan't give him a single kopeck, and I shan't even write. I'm not afraid of you dogs and I never shall be.'

The interpreter relayed what he had said, and again they all started speaking at once. After a long parley, the dark one got up and went over to Zhilin.

'Russky,' he said, '*djigit, djigit* Russky!'

'*Djigit*' is Tatar for 'fine fellow'. Laughing, the dark-haired Tatar said

shoulders disappeared below her knees, and stared, wide-eyed, at Zhilin drinking, as though he were some wild animal.

Zhilin handed her the jug, and she leapt back like a wild goat. Even her father had to laugh. He sent her away again and she ran off with the empty jug. Soon she returned with some unleavened bread on a wooden plate and again squatted down with her eyes glued on Zhilin.

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Zhilin and Kostylin were led away to the shed and given straw, a jugful of water, some bread, two old coats and worn-out boots which looked as if they had been taken from killed soldiers. At night their shackles were removed and they were locked up in the shed.

3

And so Zhilin and Kostylin lived for a whole month. Their captor kept laughing — 'You, Ivan, good; me, Abdul, good' — but he fed them poorly, on nothing but unleavened millet bread and flat cakes; sometimes the dough wasn't even baked.

Kostylin wrote another letter home and waited impatiently for the money to arrive. For days on end he sat in the shed, counting the days or sleeping. But Zhilin knew his letter would not arrive, and he wrote no other.

'How could my mother possibly get hold of so much money,' he thought. 'As it is, she lived on the money which I sent her. If she were to scrape together five hundred rubles it would ruin her completely. With God's help, I'll get out on my own.'

He spent the time walking around the *aul*, whistling and keeping his ears and eyes open for a possible escape route. At other times he sat modelling clay dolls or weaving baskets: Zhilin could turn his hand to anything.

Once he modelled a doll with a nose, arms and legs, wearing a Tatar shirt, and stood it on the roof of the shed.

As the Tatar girls were going to fetch water, Abdul's daughter, Dina, saw the doll and called to the others. They set down their pitchers and gathered round, laughing. Zhilin took down the doll and offered it to them, but they merely giggled and did not dare to take it. So he left the doll and went into the shed to wait and see what would happen.

Dina ran up, glanced round, then picked up the doll and ran away.

The next morning, at dawn, Zhilin saw Dina appear at the door with the doll. She had now dressed it up in scraps of red material and was cradling it in her arms like a baby, singing a Tatar lullaby. Then an old woman came out and scolded her, snatched the doll from her, broke it, and sent Dina off to work somewhere.

Zhilin made another doll, an even better one, and gave it to Dina. Some

time later, Dina brought a jug for him and sat down, looking at him and laughing, and pointing to the jug.

'Why is she so pleased?' Zhilin wondered. He took the jug and drank from it. He had expected water, but it was milk. When he had finished it he said, 'That was good!'

How thrilled Dina was! 'Good, Ivan,' she said, 'good!' And she jumped up, clapped her hands, snatched the jug from him and scampered off.

From then on she began stealthily to bring him milk every day, on the sly. The Tatars made flat cakes from goat's cheese and dried them on the roofs, and she would secretly bring him some. Once, when her father slaughtered a sheep, she brought him a piece of mutton in her sleeve; she threw it down and scurried away.

One day there was a heavy thunderstorm, and the rain poured for a whole hour. All the streams grew turbid, and at the ford the river overflowed its banks by several feet, tossing the stones about. Rivulets flowed all over the roaring hillside. When the storm passed, the village was awash.

Zhilin asked Abdul for a knife, with which he fashioned a wheel on a spindle, and then he attached two dolls to the wheel. The village girls brought him rags, which he used to dress up the dolls — one as a man, the other as a woman. He placed the wheel in a stream, and as the wheel turned, the dolls danced up and down.

The whole village assembled to look at it — boys, girls and women. Even the menfolk came and clicked their tongues, 'Ay, Russky, ay, Ivan!'

Abdul had a Russian watch which was broken. He called Zhilin and showed him it, clicking his tongue. 'Let's see if I can mend it,' said Zhilin.

He took the watch to pieces with a knife, put it together again, and gave it back in working order.

Abdul was delighted, and made him a present of his old coat. It was all in tatters, but Zhilin was glad to have something to cover himself with at nights.

From that time, Zhilin's fame as a master craftsman spread. People began to come in from distant villages to have things repaired by him: sometimes it would be the lock on a rifle or pistol, sometimes a clock. His master brought him tools — tweezers, gimlets and files.

Once, a Tatar fell ill and his people came to Zhilin and asked him to cure him. Zhilin had no idea how to treat sick people, but he went there

and had a look, thinking the man's health might improve of its own accord. He went into his shed and mixed some sand and water. In the presence of the Tatars he whispered some words over the water and gave it to the sick man to drink. Luckily for him, the Tatar got better.

Zhilin began to understand their language a little. And some of the Tatars grew accustomed to him, too, and would call his name 'Ivan, Ivan!'— but there were others who still looked at him askance as though he were a wild beast.

The red-bearded Tatar did not like Zhilin; he would always frown if he caught sight of him, and turn away or curse him. There was also an old man, who did not live in the *aul* itself, Zhilin only saw him when he came up the hill to pray in the village mosque. He was of small stature, and wore a white cloth wound round his hat; his clipped beard and moustache were as white as down, and his face was lined and as red as a brick; his nose was hooked like a hawk's beak, he had grey, fierce eyes and no teeth apart from a couple of fang-like eye-teeth. He used to walk about in his turban, leaning on his crutch and glowering round him like a wolf. If he saw Zhilin, he would snort and turn away.

One day Zhilin went down the hill to see where the old man lived. From the path he saw a garden with a stone wall; behind the wall there were cherry-trees and peach-trees, and a little flat-roofed cottage. When he got nearer he could see beehives made of wattled straw, surrounded by buzzing bees. The old man was down on his knees, pottering with one of the hives. Zhilin climbed a little higher to have a better look, and his shackle clanked. The old man whirled round with a squeal, pulled out a pistol from his belt and took a pot-shot at Zhilin, who only just managed to dodge behind a rock.

The old man went to Zhilin's master to complain. Laughing, Abdul called for Zhilin and asked him why he had gone to the old man's.

'I did him no harm,' he said, 'I just wanted to see how he lived.'

When he was told this, the old man was furious: he hissed and muttered, stuck out his fangs, and shook his fists at Zhilin.

Zhilin didn't understand everything, but he grasped that the old man was telling Abdul to kill the Russians, and not to keep them in the *aul*. Then the old man went away.

Zhilin asked who he was, and Abdul said, 'He is a great man — he used to be the best *djigit*! He killed many Russians, and was rich. He had three

wives and eight sons. All his sons lived in the same village. The Russians came and ravaged the village and killed seven of his sons. The one who was left alive went over to the Russians' side. So the old man joined the Russians too. He lived three months with them, found his son there, killed him and escaped. From that time he gave up fighting and went to Mecca, to pray to God. That's why he has a turban. He does not like your people — he wants to kill you. But I cannot kill you — I paid money for you; and anyway, I have grown to like you, Ivan. I wouldn't even let you go if I hadn't given my word.'

He laughed, and added in Russian, 'You, Ivan, good; me, Abdul, good!'

4

Another month passed in this way. During the day Zhilin wandered about the *aul* or plied his handicrafts, and when night fell and the *aul* grew quiet he started digging in his shed. It was hard going because of the stones, but using a file he managed to dig a hole under the wall, just big enough to crawl through. 'Now, if only I can find out exactly in which direction to go,' he thought. 'But none of the Tatars ever speak about it.'

He chose one afternoon when the master was away to go up the hillside beyond the village and have a look at the land from there. But Abdul had ordered his little boy to watch Zhilin in his absence, telling him never to take his eyes off him. The boy ran after Zhilin, crying, 'Don't do ! My father forbade it. I'll shout for help!'

Zhilin tried to reason with him: 'I shan't go far — only to the top of that hill. I need herbs to treat your people with. Come along with me. I can't run away with this shackle anyway. And tomorrow I'll make you a bow and arrows.'

He persuaded the boy and they set off. The hill did not look far away, but because of the shackle Zhilin needed all his strength to climb it. At the top he sat down and studied the lie of the land. To the south, in the valley on the other side of the hill, he could see another *aul* and a herd of horses. Beyond the *aul* rose another hill, even steeper, and beyond it, yet another. Between the hills lay the bluish mass of forest, and farther in the distance towered snow-capped mountains, glistening like sugar, each one rising higher than the next. The same mountains ringed the horizon from

east and west; here and there a Tatar village smoked in a gorge. Well, that's all their territory, thought Zhilin, and he turned to look north, to the Russian side. Below him were the stream and his *aul*, surrounded by little gardens. Like tiny dolls, he could see some women washing clothes in the stream. Beyond the village rose a hill, and further off two more hills, covered with trees, and between them he could glimpse a plain in the far distance, a dim blue colour, like smoke. Zhilin tried to recall where the sun had risen and set when he lived in the fortress. He felt certain now: the fortress must be on that plain. He would have to make for the space between those hills.

The sun was setting. The snow-covered mountains flushed crimson and the dark hills turned black; the hollows grew vaporous, and that plain where the Russian fortress surely was, burned in the afterglow as though it were on fire. Zhilin peered into the distance and felt he could see something in the valley – smoke, rising from chimneys – and he fancied it must be his fortress.

It was getting late – Zhilin had heard the mullah calling, and the lowing of cattle driven home. Abdul's boy kept insisting that they should go back, but Zhilin did not feel like moving.

But return they did, and Zhilin's mind was made up: 'Now that I know the way, I must escape.' He wanted to make an attempt that very night – it was dark, for there was a new moon – but, as ill luck would have it, the Tatars returned that evening in a foul mood. Sometimes they would come home in high spirits, with captured cattle, but this time they brought back one of their men dead — the brother of the red-bearded one. They were angry as they gathered to bury him. Zhilin came out to watch. They wrapped the dead body in a cloth, carried him out of the village and laid him without a coffin on the grass beneath the plane-trees. The mullah came, and the old men in their turbans took off their shoes and squatted down before the dead man, with the other Tatars behind them. They sat in silence with their eyes lowered.

For a long time no one spoke, then the mullah raised his head and said, 'Allah!' Having said this one word, he lowered his head again and another long silence ensued, during which no one moved.

Again the mullah looked up and said, 'Allah!' This time all the others repeated the word, 'Allah!', and fell silent again. The mourners were as motionless as the dead man lying on the grass. Only the leaves in the

plane-tree could be heard rustling in the breeze. Then the mullah said a prayer, and they all got up and took the dead man in their arms to carry him to his grave. The grave was not a simple hole in the ground, but was dug out like a cellar. Holding the dead man under the arms and by the legs, they eased him down and placed him in a sitting position under the ground, with his hands clasped against his stomach.

A Caucasian servant brought some green rushes with which they closed the hole; then they covered it with earth, levelled it out, and erected a standing stone over the dead man's head. They flattened the earth with their feet and then sat down again before the grave. After another lengthy silence they spoke, 'Allah! Allah! Allah!' And heaving a sigh, they stood up.

The red-bearded Tatar distributed money among the old men, then took a lash and chastised himself three times across the forehead before setting off for home.

The next morning Zhilin saw the same man leading a mare out of the village, accompanied by three other Tatars. When they stopped, Kazi-Muhamed took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves — his arms were powerful — and began whetting his dagger on a stone. His assistants forced the mare's head back while he slit her throat, and he pushed the animal to the ground and set about skinning it, ripping off its hide with his brawny fists. The women and girls came to wash its guts and inside, then they chopped it into pieces and took it back to Kazi-Muhamed's cottage. And the whole village gathered there for the wake to mourn his dead brother.

For three days they feasted on the mare, drank *buza* and prayed for the dead man. All the Tatars were there, but on the fourth day Zhilin noticed them setting out somewhere around midday. About ten men rode off, including the red-bearded one. Only Abdul remained.

The nights were still dark, for the moon was only just beginning to wax. Zhilin told Kostylin of his intention to escape that night.

But Kostylin took fright. 'How can we escape? We don't even know the way.'

'I know the way.'

'But we shan't make it in one night.'

'If we don't we'll spend the night in the forest. I've saved some bread. What's the point of sitting here? All very well if they do send your money,

but what if they can't get that much together? Besides, the Tatars are angry now, because one of their men was killed by the Russians. There's talk of killing us.'

Kostylin thought and thought, and finally agreed.

5

Zhilin crawled into his tunnel and widened it a little so that Kostylin could pass through too.

They waited until the village was quiet, then Zhilin crawled under the wall of the shed and emerged on the other side. Urged on by Zhilin, Kostylin crawled into the hole too, but his foot caught on a stone and it made a noise. Abdul had a guard-dog — an extremely savage one — called Ulyashin. Zhilin had taken the precaution of feeding it earlier. When it heard the noise, Ulyashin barked and came running, followed by some other dogs. Zhilin whistled to it quietly and tossed it a piece of bread. Recognising him, Ulyashin wagged its tail and stopped barking.

Abdul shouted to the dog from his hut, but Ulyashin was quiet already, wagging its tail and rubbing itself against Zhilin's leg as he stroked it behind the ears.

They sat behind a corner until all was quiet. Only a sheep could be heard baaing in a pen, and the water gurgling over the pebbles down below. It was dark; stars stood high in the heavens; over the mountains the red new moon was setting, its horns turned upwards. The valleys were full of milky-white fog.

Zhilin got up and said to Kostylin, 'Right, old chap, let's get going.'

Hardly had they moved, when they heard the mullah crying from a rooftop, 'Allah! Besmilla! Ilrahman!' It was the call for the people to go to the mosque. Zhilin and Kostylin hid behind a wall and sat there for a long time, until all the people had passed and it grew quiet again.

"God help us!" They crossed themselves and set off, first down to the stream, then across it and into the valley. The fog was thick down here, but the stars were bright, so that Zhilin could tell which way to go. The fog was fresh and pleasant to walk in, but their battered boots were uncomfortable. Zhilin took his off and threw them away, and then hurried on, leaping from stone to stone and keeping an eye on the stars. Kostylin began to fall behind.

'Slow down a bit,' he said. 'These blasted boots are chafing me.'

'Take them off, then. It'll be easier.'

Kostylin soldiered on barefoot, but that was even worse: he cut his feet on the stones and fell further behind.

'If you skin your feet,' said Zhilin, 'they'll heal again, but if they catch you, you're dead. Which is worse?'

Kostylin struggled on without a word, groaning now and again. For a long time they kept to the low ground. Then they heard dogs barking to the right; Zhilin stopped and looked round, then climbed the hill, feeling the way with his hands.

'Ah,' he said, 'we've wandered too far to the right. That's the other village over there, the one I saw from the top of the hill. We'll have to go back and then up the hillside on the left. There should be woods there.'

But Kostylin complained. 'Wait just a moment and let me rest. My feet are all bleeding.'

'Why, they'll heal, old man. Be a bit lighter on your feet. Look!'

And Zhilin ran off into the wooded hillside, leaving Kostylin behind groaning. Zhilin kept hissing at him and striding out ahead.

They climbed the slope, and sure enough, there were the woods. Ripping their clothes, they fought their way through the brushwood and finally came to a forest path which they could take.

'Wait!' They could hear the sound of hoofs, like a horse coming along the path. Then the noise stopped. When they moved, the noise started again. And when they stopped, it stopped. Zhilin crept nearer and saw some animal standing on the path; it looked rather like a horse, but it had something weird on top of it, not like a man. It gave a snort. 'Amazing!' thought Zhilin. He whistled quietly, and the animal rushed with a crash into the forest, smashing branches like a hurricane.

Kostylin collapsed with fright. But Zhilin laughed, saying, 'It's only a deer. Can't you hear it breaking the branches with its antlers! We're afraid of it, but it's afraid of us!'

They continued on their way. The stars were beginning to sink in the west; dawn was not far off. But whether they were heading in the right direction or not, they did not know. Zhilin had the notion that this was the path along which the Tatars had brought him and that they must be about ten versts from home. But there was no sure sign, and in the dark it was hard to make anything out. They came out into a clearing.

Kostylin sat down and said, 'I won't make it. I'm all in.'

Zhilin tried to urge him on, but he insisted, 'No, I won't make it, I can't.'

Zhilin lost his temper, spat, and cursed him. 'Then I'll go alone. Good-bye!'

Kostylin jumped to his feet and followed him. They covered another four versts or so. The fog settled in the forest even more thickly, and they could see nothing. Even the stars were scarcely visible.

Suddenly they heard a horse trotting, its shoes ringing on the stones. Zhilin lay down and put his ear to the ground.

'Sure enough, a horseman is coming this way.'

They dived into the bushes beside the path to wait. Zhilin crept up to the path and saw that the rider was a Tatar, driving a cow and humming quietly. When he was past, Zhilin went back to Kostylin and said, 'Well, God has spared us. Get up, let's get going.'

Kostylin tried to stand up, but he fell back. 'Oh, I can't, I swear I can't. I've no strength left.'

He was a bulky, corpulent man, and was covered with sweat; and what with the cold fog in the forest, and his torn feet, he was spent. Zhilin tried to lift him bodily, and Kostylin cried out, 'Oh, it hurts!'

Zhilin froze. 'Shut up! The Tatar is close by — he'll hear.' But he was thinking: he really is weak — what can I do with him? One can't desert a comrade.

'Well, then,' he said, 'climb onto my back. If you can't walk, I'll carry you.'

He heaved Kostylin onto his back, gripped him under the thighs, and carried him up the path.

'Only don't throttle me, for Ghrist's sake,' he said. 'Hold me by the shoulders.'

It was hard going: Zhilin was exhausted and his feet were bleeding too. He was stooping and had to keep jerking Kostylin up, so that he sat higher on his back.

The Tatar must have heard Kostylin's cry. Zhilin could hear someone riding along the path behind them, calling something in Tatar. Zhilin plunged into the bushes. The Tatar seized his gun and fired, but missed, then galloped away with a screech.

'Well,' said Zhilin, 'we've had it now! That dog is about to muster his

friends to come after us. If we don't get another couple of miles behind us, we've had it!' At the same time he was thinking of Kostylin: why the hell did I bring this fat oaf with me? On my own I'd have got away long ago.

Kostylin told him to go on alone: 'Why should you perish because of me?'

'No, I shan't leave you. It wouldn't do to desert a comrade.'

He hauled him onto his back again and struggled on for about a verst, and still no end could be seen to the forest. The fog was beginning to lift, but there seemed to be clouds about, for the stars were no longer visible. Zhilin was worn out.

At length they came to a little stone well by the roadside. Zhilin stopped and set down Kostylin. 'Let me rest and have a drink. We can eat some bread. It can't be far now.'

No sooner had he crouched to drink than he heard the sound of hooves approaching. Again they darted down into the bushes and lay still.

They heard Tatar voices. The Tatars halted at the very place where Zhilin and Kostylin had left the path. They spoke, then seemed to be urging their dogs on. The two Russians heard something crackling through the undergrowth, and then a dog came straight up to them and started barking.

After it came some Tatars whom Zhilin did not know. The Russians were seized, bound, put on horses and carried off.

When they had ridden some three versts they met Abdul with two men from his *aul*. After a few words with their captors, they took the Russians onto their own horses and set forth to their village.

Abdul was no longer laughing and he spoke not a word to them.

They arrived in the *aul* at daybreak and Zhilin and Kostylin were made to sit on the ground. The village children ran up screaming and began throwing stones and beating them with whips.

The Tatars gathered in a circle and were joined by the old man from down the hill. Zhilin could hear that they were discussing what to do with them. Some were saying they should be sent farther into the mountains, but the old man wanted them killed. Abdul argued, 'I paid money for them; I want the ransom.' But the old man was adamant, 'They won't pay a penny; they'll just cause trouble. It's a sin to feed Russians. Kill them and have done with it.'

The Tatars dispersed and Abdul approached Zhilin. 'If,' he said, 'I don't receive ransom money for you within two weeks, I shall flog you to death. And if you try to escape again, I'll slay you like a dog. Write another letter — and make it a good one!'

They were brought paper and they wrote letters. Shackles were put on them and they were taken away beyond the mosque, where there was a hole in the ground, about twelve feet deep. It was in this pit that they were to be kept.

6

Life became quite insufferable for them now. Their shackles were never removed, and they were not allowed above ground. Like dogs, they had unbaked dough thrown to them, and water was lowered in a pitcher. The pit stank and it was stuffy and damp. Kostylin became quite ill: his body swelled up and ached in every bone, and he was constantly groaning or sleeping. Zhilin, too, was in low spirits: he could see that things were bad but could think of no way out.

He started a tunnel, but there was nowhere to put the earth. The master saw it and threatened to kill him.

Once he was sitting on his haunches at the bottom of the pit, dreaming of freedom, when a flat cake suddenly dropped into his lap, then another, and then some cherries. He looked up, and there was Dina. She glanced down at him, laughed and ran off.

Zhilin began to wonder whether Dina could not help him.

He cleared a little space in the pit and scraped out some clay to make dolls with. He modelled figures of people, horses and dogs, thinking: when Dina comes I'll throw them up to her.

But the following day Dina did not come. Zhilin heard horses galloping past, and then the Tatars assembled near the mosque, shouting and arguing, and saying something about the Russians. He heard the old man's voice. He could not make out the conversation properly, but he guessed that the Russians were near by and that the Tatars were afraid lest they should attack the village, and that they did not know what to do with their captives.

Eventually they went away. Suddenly Zhilin heard a rustling sound above him. He looked up and saw Dina, squatting with her knees higher

than her head, leaning over the edge with her necklace dangling. Her eyes were sparkling like little stars. She took two cheese cakes out of her sleeve and tossed them to him. Zhilin took them and said, 'Why haven't you been for so long? I've made you toys — catch!' He started throwing them up, one by one, but she did not look at them, and merely shook her head.

'Don't,' she said. She sat for a moment, and then said, 'Ivan! They want to kill you.' And she demonstrated her words by drawing her finger across her neck.

'Who wants to kill me?'

'My father. The old men order him to. I feel sorry for you.'

'Well, if you feel sorry for me,' said Zhilin, 'bring me a long stick.'

She shook her head. He clasped his hands and begged her: 'Dina, please. Dina, my dear girl, please bring one.'

'I can't,' she said. 'They would see — they're all at home.' And she went away.

That evening, Zhilin sat wondering what would become of him. He kept glancing up: the stars were out, but the moon had not yet risen. The mullah called, and the place became quiet. Zhilin was beginning to doze, thinking that Dina would be too afraid to come.

All of a sudden some crumbed clay fell on his head. He looked up and there was a long pole, sticking over the edge. It poked about a bit and then began to descend. Zhilin was overjoyed. He grabbed the pole and lowered it down. It was a good strong pole — he remembered seeing it on his master's roof.

High in the sky the stars were shining; and just above the pit Dina's eyes, too, were gleaming in the darkness like a cat's. She bent right down to the edge and whispered, 'Ivan, Ivan!' and waved her hand in front of her face, meaning: keep quiet.

'What?' asked Zhilin.

'They're all away; only two are left.'

'Come on, Kostylin, let's go,' said Zhilin. 'We'll make one last effort. I'll help you out.'

But Kostylin would not hear of it. 'No,' he said, 'it looks as if I'm here for good. Where can I go, when I haven't even the strength to turn?'

'In that case, farewell. Don't think badly of me.' The two men kissed each other on the cheeks.

He grasped the pole, told Dina to hold it steady, and tried to climb up.

Twice he fell back, hampered by his shackle. With Kostylin's support he somehow managed to clamber up. Dina hauled at his shirt with her hands and could not help laughing.

Zhilin pulled up the pole and said, 'Put it back where you got it, Dina, or else they'll miss it and give you a hiding.'

She dragged the pole away and Zhilin set off down the hill. At the foot of the slope he found a sharp stone and tried to wrench open the padlock on his shackle. But the padlock was strong, and it was made even more difficult by the awkward position he had to sit in. Then he heard someone running lightly down the hill and assumed it must be Dina. She ran up, took the stone and said, 'Let me try.'

She knelt down and tried to prize the lock open, but her hands were as slender as little twigs and did not have the strength for it. She threw away the stone and burst into tears. Zhilin set to work again on the padlock, and Dina squatted beside him with her hand on his shoulder. Zhilin looked round: there was a red glow behind the hill over to the left – the moon was rising. 'I must cover the lowland and reach the forest before the moon is up,' he thought. He stood up and flung away the stone. Shackle or no shackle, he would have to go.

'Farewell, Dina,' he said, 'I shall remember you as long as I live.'

Dina grasped at him and searched him with her hands for somewhere to put her loaves. He took them from her. 'Thank you,' he said, 'clever girl. Who will make you dolls when I'm gone?' And he stroked her head.

Dina started crying again, covered her face with her hands, and scurried off up the hill, leaping like a young goat. Only the coins in her hair could be heard jingling in the dark.

Zhilin crossed himself, held the padlock high so that it would not clank, and set out along the road, dragging his foot and keeping an eye on the red glow in the sky where the moon was coming up. He recognised the road: he had to keep straight ahead for about eight versts. If only he could reach the forest before the moon gained height. He crossed the stream; the glow behind the mountain had now turned white. As he traversed the low area, the moon itself was still not to be seen. At one end of the valley it was growing lighter and lighter, with the edge of the shadow creeping further and further down the slope towards him.

Zhilin walked on, keeping to the shadow. He moved as fast as he could, but the moon was climbing even faster; now the peaks over on the right

were illuminated too. He still had not reached the forest when the moon emerged from behind the mountains and it became as bright as day. All the leaves on the trees were visible. There was a deathly stillness and pallor over the mountains. All that could be heard was the rippling of the brook down below.

At last he gained the forest; no one had seen him. Zhilin found a dark spot and sat down to rest. He ate of the flat cakes, and then took a stone and tried to break open his shackle again. He bruised his hands, but the shackle remained intact, so he got up and continued on his way. After another verst he was footsore and flagging. Every few yards he had to stop. 'There's no thing for it — he thought — I'll have to drag myself along until my strength runs out. If I sit down I'll never get up again. I shan't reach the fortress tonight; when it gets light I'll lie low in the forest, and set off again when it is dark.

All night Zhilin walked. The only incident was when two Tatars rode by, but Zhilin heard them a long way off and had time to hide behind a tree.

The moon began to pale and the dew fell as the dawn approached. Zhilin still had not reached the end of the forest. 'Well — he thought — another thirty steps, and then I shall go into the trees and lie down. But thirty steps later the forest came to an end. Standing at the edge, he saw the steppe stretched out before him, as clear as day; he could see the fortress, and, at the foot of the hill on the left, smouldering fires with people round them. He strained his eyes and saw guns glinting: they were Russian soldiers and Cossacks!

Zhilin was overcome with joy. He summoned his last ounce of strength and started down the hill, praying that no Tatar horseman would see him here, in the open field: 'I may be close, but I wouldn't get away.

No sooner had this thought flitted through his mind than he beheld three mounted Tatars on a hillock only a few hundred yards away. They had seen him, and were racing towards him. Zhilin's heart plummetted. He waved his hands and shouted for all he was worth: 'Lads! Help me, lads!'

The Cossacks heard him and jumped to their horses. They came galloping towards him, hoping to intercept the Tatars.

The Cossacks were a long way off; the Tatars were close. Mustering all his strength, Zhilin lifted his shackle and ran towards the Cossacks, crossing

himself and yelling, 'Help me, chaps, help me!'

The Cossacks numbered about fifteen; the Tatars took fright and began to pull up before they reached Zhilin.

Zhilin staggered up to the Cossacks. They surrounded him, asking who he was and where he had come from.

But Zhilin was beside himself, weeping and blabbering, 'Lads! Lads!'

Some foot soldiers came running up and gathered round. Some offered him bread, others gruel, still others vodka. Someone put a greatcoat round his shoulders, while another set about smashing his shackle.

The officers recognised him and took him into the fortress. The soldiers were delighted, and Zhilin's old comrades all crowded round.

Zhilin related everything that had happened to him, and added, 'So much for going home and getting married! No, it's obviously not meant to be.'

And he remained in service in the Caucasus.

Kostylin's five-thousand-ruble ransom was paid in another month, and he was brought home barely alive.

This book is a collection of short stories about children and for children by nineteenth-century authors. Actually, these stories were not written specially for children, but finding a warm response in their hearts they became their favourite reading and are as popular to this day.

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